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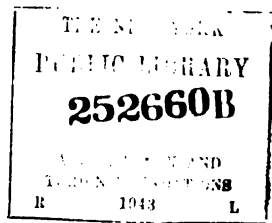
By
UNA L. SILBERRAD

*Author of "Petronilla Heroven" "The Wedding of the Lady of Lovell"
"The Success of Mark Wyngate" etc*

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CHAPTER I

THE little church was very full that evening. People came from a long distance to attend the services which were held in Curayl old church on alternate Sundays during the summer months. This, partly because the walk was pleasant, and partly because it was only a few times in the year that service was held in the old church now that both pastor and flock had been gone southwards to Gainsford some hundred years or more. The high pews were all full that night, and chairs had even been placed in the narrow aisle—a somewhat uncomfortable arrangement, for the chairs were a heterogeneous collection, and the flagged floor was very uneven. The bell stopped; even the latest comer had found a place. The harmonium, all the music the place afforded now, sounded wheezily, only half drowning the rustle and movement of the congregation. The sunlight still streamed in through the lower windows on the rough stonework of the walls and the Gothic arches, but the east end was already dim, and the dusty old banners, relics of the family of Curayl, looked like great flapping bats away in the roof.

Mr. Clifford, the temporary rector of Ashly, was late. He was a stranger, and only had the parish of Ashly during a month's holiday; he had nothing at all to do with Gainsford, it was solely to oblige the

On this account perhaps was excusable, but it was none the less for it was said he was a High Church likely to be punctilious. A good man of the congregation knew something. Some few had even heard him preach and had admired his sermons sufficiently to expedition to Curayl. Others only knew reputation and came to hear if his preaching was as reputed, or else to see what his practices looked like when translated in Others, again, had heard nothing and cared not. Of this last sort was Beatrice Curayl. She sat alone in the great front pew. There were many from some country place near at the east seat, but she was not the less really alone though they did not know who she was and felt, separated from her by a great distance. She sat solitary, expecting nothing, curious of nothing; there because, in spite of her name, she was still a Curayl, and though the family was ruined and well-nigh extinct, she deemed it a courtesy due to the Almighty for her, to be present in His house on the rare occasions when there was service there. CL - 1



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had a desire to see a clergyman whose very name she did not know.

The congregation waited for their pastor, who certainly was very late. They rustled and whispered, the visitors glancing once or twice at the lady at the end of the pew, while she on her part sat motionless and indifferent, not even so much as looking up. Even when Mr. Ranger, the churchwarden of Gainsford, who filled the same office when service was held at the old church, went out to see if there were any signs of the belated clergyman, she did not look up.

Mr. Ranger was gone a full two minutes; then he returned wearing a smile of relief. The harmonium went conscientiously on, but the voluntary choir of young men and women whispered unreservedly together. Suddenly they stopped; the narrow door which led from the vestry was opened—the clergyman had come. But it was not Mr. Clifford; those members of the congregation who had heard him preach before recognized that, and looked at each other in disappointment; those who had only heard of him and hoped to see signs of ritual were equally disappointed. The man, though he wore surplice and stole of the highest church order, behaved as simply as it was possible for man to behave.

Beatrice Curayl glanced up when the clergyman entered. Something in his appearance must have arrested her attention, for she did not look away again but watched him come down the chancel; even watched him after he was in his place, and a hanging lamp above his head helped the evening light to show his face. It was a curious face, the more curious for its clerical setting—tanned and thin, with a capacious skull but pointed chin and

...city. She was not aware she had pr
abled musician in those days, but now she
had, and the picture was like this man.
Service began. Mr. Clifford's substitute
ll, so well that some people wished Mr. R
l not assist by reading the lessons that eve
e clergyman apparently did not share the op
all events he occupied all the time of the l
y fully. During the first he turned the l
a small Bible as if he were looking for some
ring the second he studied his Prayer
sely; the members of the choir who sat ne
n said afterwards that he was looking at
ter part of the evening service. It was ev
t he must have agreed to fill Mr. Clifford's
y late, for he did not know the numbers c
nns chosen. But if he did not know before
ich they were, there was no doubt about
ging them. His voice was beautiful, true
h and sweet, quite untrained—he did not att
ntone the service—yet so strong that it le
ir, and kept them together in a masterly fas
ll present agreed afterwards that the se
very well conducted, although the clerg
er so much as bowed to the altar or once



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quite at ease; he looked round over his congregation, seeming to pick out a face here and another there in a way that concentrated attention.

He gave out his text, "Thou, Lord, art merciful; Thou rewardest every man according to his works."

That sermon! It was long remembered at Gainsford. It was always remembered by some who heard it, even though they could not give a clear account of it. Those who came to hear Mr. Clifford went away astonished that they had ever thought Mr. Clifford worth hearing. And those who had come on account of High or Low Church opinion wondered—for a time at least—how such opinions ever came to weigh. The visitors, who were Londoners and connoisseurs who had heard some famous preachers, said they had never heard anything like this man. He was an orator, so one of them remarked afterwards, as if that explained a great deal, and a man of the world, another commented, as if that explained more. But an old village woman who sat on a back bench and watched the keen light eyes and the curious comprehending smile that came of a sudden, only said, "He knows—he knows all about it."

That perhaps was the predominant though unrecognized feeling among those who listened spell-bound while the stranger twisted the text to fit his subject. His subject was a simple one—in plain terms, consequences. Not the wrath of an angry God, but the mercy that deals justly and allows man to truly reap what he has sown. Not punishment, simply inevitable consequences—disease and distrust, and the insidious deterioration of the mental and moral fibre; unlovely loneliness, suspicious age and sour discontent; the Dead-Sea fruit of disillusion and remorse, the hundred ghosts that



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besiege a man who has only "done as others have done," whose sin has never publicly found him out. Of such things the preacher spoke, not threatening them as wrath to come, but speaking of them as God's justice now with man, God's mercy that deals truly here and hereafter. It was noticeable that he did not blame wrong-doing; when he spoke of it he spoke of it kindly, sympathetically, as one who understood and did not condemn—that was perhaps one of the reasons why he so riveted attention. Another certainly lay in his magnetic power of personal appeal; when one looked at him it was as if he looked directly back. When across the darkening church listeners' eyes met preacher's, it seemed to the listener that the preaching was to him alone.—That in the pulpit was one who, too, had tried and found sweet the venial offence, the small shortcoming.—Who by the free-masonry of a common weakness had singled out him, the comprehended and not condemned fellow-sinner, and was speaking to him and for him in a language none other would really understand. A dozen, many more than a dozen faces were lifted to the speaker's; each, had the owners but known it, self-revealing; each hearing the magic tongue speaking in the language of their own sin, and each, for the moment, feeling that sin condoned.

But this kindly tolerant preacher who did not condemn, yet promised the justice of God. Gradually the grim note crept into the eloquence, and he warned them to be prepared for the consequences, to be ready to pay like men for all they had had and done. In the old gray building where so many generations had sat, the folk sat now and listened while the common facts of common experience were set before them, incontrovertibly and as it were in



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a blaze of light. This was no denunciation of sin, as, had they but known it, it was planned they should have that night, but nevertheless there were words that pricked to the marrow. No punishment for transgressed law; only the earned consequences, for which a man may blame fate or his neighbour or himself, but which he can no more escape than he can death or birth. In the fading light the faces looked white and strained as they were raised to the stranger. He leaned more forward, his eyes growing brighter as, carried away by his own eloquence, he thrilled with the thrill of his hearers, his every nerve vibrating with those who hung on his words, and were for the moment swayed by the mere impulse of his will.

How did he conclude? No one quite knew; he spoke a little of the reverse of the picture, the mercy of the justice that regards motives as well as acts, and gives consequences sweet as well as bitter. He must have placed man in a very fine position in the end, this arrogant preacher, for he seems to have set him unconfined, and at liberty to choose for himself in the world. He made him free to decide for himself what was right and wrong, to weigh actions and motives and to decide according to his light. But he also warned him that to the uttermost he would have to pay and be paid for this grand liberty, for all he did and thought and was. The mercy of God, according to him, was a just reward, a royal mercy, not a mercy for slaves, but for men who dared stand up and face their God.

So the sermon ended, and the congregation, curiously hushed and grateful for the soft twilight that veiled all faces, got to their feet. They fumbled for their hymn books and opened them not looking



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at one another, each occupied with his own thoughts and still vibrating with some strange emotion. The sermon, however, regarded theologically or from a point of view of edification, was a fine hypnotic achievement. The preacher may have been a man of the world and an orator or something of a literateur, though nothing of a priest; but he certainly was touched for once with the fire of the master magicians to whose piping men dance, and to whose wailing they weep, and to whose eyes they reveal themselves as they are whether they will or no.

The last notes of the evening hymn died away, the benediction was spoken, and the people began to go. Beatrice Curayl was late to move. She sat very still in the shadow of her high pew, her white hands locked over one another, her fingers intertwined in a way that almost hurt. She still watched the preacher—she watched him till the vestry door shut him from view. She knew every line of his strong body, every change of his keen eyes, every curve of the sudden smile, every vibration of the curious compelling voice. She had watched him unseeingly, yet so closely that the whole was photographed on her mind, and later she could recall every line and lineament though now she saw nothing. The man was nothing to her, the message—she asked counsel of none, she never dreamed to give heed to preacher or sermon, yet this man's message came knocking at the doors of her innermost being.

The consequences.—That was what he had said, and he had looked straight at her, with eyes that seemed to see to her soul. The thing you have done, the thing you may yet do, will bear its fruit. Defy the world, defy your own judgment, defy what



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you call God, do what you will ; but that which you do will have its result and in the end the result, spreading further and taking forms other than you now guess, will be good and bad, bitter and sweet, exactly and fairly proportioned to the act and the motive. If he had called it wrong she would have disdainfully denied his right to judge, and proudly maintained that common right and wrong were nothing to her—a Curayl was a law unto himself. But no man, Curayl or other, so the preacher said, could escape that inevitable thing he had called “the mercy of the Lord.” Time would deal justice, time would bring a thousand consequences to others, to herself, to body, soul, and spirit, weaving a warp through all the years. She leaned more forward without knowing it, looking fixedly up the little old chancel. Her breath came short and her eyes grew dark and fearful, as if in the dim place she saw the narrowing vista of the years, as if there she saw them closing in upon her, and in the dusty banners that hung on the dark roof beams there was a Nemesis that shadowed the time to come.

“No, not Mr. Clifford; a stranger. Mr. Clifford met with an accident; the gentleman took his place.”

The words reached Beatrice disjointedly. They were spoken by the old sexton to some inquirer who had come back to ask the name of the preacher, and now stood just beyond the Curayl pew. The sound of voices roused Beatrice. Mechanically, she rose and went out; she moved with stately indifference, but for all that there was that in her mind which kept her from noticing that the church was empty now except for the old sexton, who was carefully extinguishing the lamps in the chancel.

Outside it was fast growing dark, still warm but with a dewy fragrance in the air. In the distance



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there was the sound of steps growing fainter as the congregation dispersed. Beatrice took a path that passed under the old yews to the gate which led only to her house. The grass was thick here on the sunken mounds of the old graves; it deadened the sound of footsteps so that she went noiselessly and without heeding where she was going, till she almost ran against some one coming from the side door of the church. She looked up—they were out of the gloom of the trees now—and saw that it was the preacher. Involuntarily she stopped; the man was so sub-consciously mixed with the thoughts in her mind that to meet him thus did not seem unexpected. When she stopped he half paused too. He only saw her as a vague woman's figure in the gloom, and so would have gone on had not something in the abruptness of her standstill made him fancy she wished to speak to him.

For a moment she stood silent, then she spoke, but all she said was, "You are a stranger here, are you not?"

"Quite a stranger," he answered. "I have never been here before, and have good reason to believe I shall never come here again."

She made no reply, and after waiting a moment he turned to go with a lift of the hat and a pleasant good-night, but she stopped him.

"Do you believe what you said this evening?" she asked abruptly.

He hesitated a moment, and the hesitation, had he only known it, was worth all the assurance in the world just then. For a second he reviewed what he had said when, thrilled with his own eloquence, he had himself been carried away quite as much as his hearers. That rapid review was curious, almost painful to him. Some men do not like to be



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called upon to pronounce their beliefs in cold blood. This one did not; he would have shirked behind some conventional answer if he could, but something in the forced control of the voice that asked, demanded the truth as naked soul demands of naked soul. So for a moment he thought, then he answered gravely, "I think I do. I may not always call some things by the names I gave them to-night, but what I said is substantially what I have believed and do still believe."

"You think a right motive will not avail?" she asked. "You think if the motive is right and the deed is wrong, the motive will not avail? But you said it did; you said motives came into the account."

"I believe they do. I believe we receive the consequences of both act and motive, both the good and bad. Sometimes they neutralize one another; sometimes both remain, the good and bad side by side. We have to judge which is likely to be the greater in result, the good or the bad."

"Then the end justifies the means?"

"It seems so sometimes if the good of the end is greater than the evil of the means. Usually, though, if the means are very crooked the end is scarcely worth reaching, the journey there is too costly; the ill results of the crooked means have a tendency to more than outweigh the good results of the straight end."

She drew further into the shadow; for a moment it seemed she had no more to say. Then suddenly she changed her mind, perhaps remembering that he was a stranger never likely to cross her path again, perhaps because she was still under the spell of his extraordinary eloquence. "What should you say of a woman who sold herself—deliberately

hare, and for the sake of her family she was
tified. The last of an old name has obligations
than mere personal likes and dislikes; per-
sons have a claim upon her."

"To have the future," the voice answered
of the gloom. "Surely the future demands
a woman choose the best father she can
find. If the man to whom she sells herself
such buyers sometimes are, she would do well
to think before she strikes the bargain."

"I moved disdainfully. "Are not all men
so at some time?" she asked with contempt.
Her tone changed. "Tell me," she said, "what
shall she do when the bargain is struck? I mean
if she finds that she has been mistaken and that
it fails in mass and detail. Is she to abide by
it if it is totally bad? Answer me as man
not priest to woman."

"One has usually to abide by one's bargains,"
he replied, "it is not gentlemanly for either party
to back off. We can't exactly do it. We don't
find a place for repentance. One can't withdraw
such affairs in public and daren't think of
a private; there is nothing for it but to lau-



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imagine, look upon it more as a commercial transaction."

The preacher agreed: "And if she is wise," he said, "she would carefully and in cold blood weigh the good and bad first, both the mental and moral effects and the honour involved."

"Honour? There is no question of that sort in it."

"I am of the same opinion. The wedding ring is of little importance in such cases. The man buys the woman he wants for the price which will purchase her. The spirit is much the same whether there is a ring in the bargain or not."

He spoke with studied indifference, but the figure beneath the yews recoiled as if under a blow. He felt as if he had given one, as if he had struck a woman in the face; he was heartily ashamed of himself. Yet he stood his ground; since he had begun to give conscience a chance it should have fair play for once. But Beatrice had recovered herself and half remembered that she was a Curayl.

"How dare you!" she said, her voice low and controlled, but somehow very angry. "How dare you say such a thing!"

"Pardon me," he answered, "I forgot myself. I was speaking of this hypothetical case as man to man."

"That is not how men think of it," she retorted.

"That is how I think of it," he answered. "I can speak for no other."

"You!" she cried. She had come out from under the shadow of the trees now, her head erect, her bearing almost insolent in its pride. "Who are you?"

"Nobody," he answered; "less than nobody; a chance stranger, who for a moment came across



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your path and goes again without having even seen your face or known your name."

He raised his hat and turned away, and before she knew it he was gone, stepping silently over the old graves in the shadow of the trees.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Anthony Luttrell, the man who had preached on the just mercy of God, left Beatrice he made his way across the churchyard alone. The congregation had entirely dispersed by this time, and without meeting any one he came to the gate. There, however, he found Mr. Ranger, who seemed to be on the look out for some one. He came hurrying forward at the sound of the gate.

"Ah, my dear sir," he exclaimed, "I have been looking for you everywhere. I can't think how I missed you coming out of church."

Luttrell could guess how it happened, but he did not explain. He made no effort at all to learn the name of the woman who had spoken to him.

"You are a stranger here?" Mr. Ranger remarked as they walked down the lane together.

"A total stranger," the other answered. "Mr. Clifford met with an accident, as I told you. He was thrown out of his dog cart on the way here, and was so seriously hurt that it was impossible for him to come on, so I took his place."

"Very sad," Mr. Ranger said, "very sad indeed. I hope it is not likely to be serious? Such things often are, there is the brain to consider with a fall on the head. You are a friend of Mr. Clifford's, of course?"



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"I used to be a good while ago. I have not seen anything of him for several years. It was the merest chance that we met this morning. I had no idea that he was in this part of the country ; in fact, I had completely lost sight of him."

The churchwarden commented on the regrettable way in which old friendships dissolved, and remarked that the revival of this one to-day was a fortunate coincidence. "If you had not been here," he said, "I am afraid we should have had no service in the old church to-night. It is so difficult to find a clergyman to take duty at a moment's notice ; in these out-of-the-way country places it is practically impossible. And certainly, except for the coincidence of your presence, we should not have had the intellectual treat we did. I need hardly tell you, used no doubt as you are to a congregation worthy of your powers, that such preaching is a novelty in our little church."

The preacher smiled, but the compliment did not draw from him the name of the place which usually enjoyed his eloquence. Instead of giving it he asked Mr. Ranger if he considered the sermon an intellectual treat. "I am not sure myself that its effects were not more emotional than intellectual," he said. "Certainly judging by one or two things I should say they were of a somewhat mixed order to be called a treat."

Mr. Ranger agreed politely, and the conversation drifted away from the sermon. In the course of it the churchwarden learned that Luttrell did not think of going all the way back to Ashly that night.

"I was not a guest at the rectory when the accident happened," he explained, "and I think if I went back I should only be in the way. Clifford is in good hands ; the doctor arrived before I left,



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and they have sent for Mrs. Clifford to come and take charge; the housekeeper seems a sensible woman, well able to do all that is wanted at present. Clifford was quite unconscious; there was very little any one could do. I thought of putting up somewhere here. I suppose there is some inn nearer than Gainsford? Any place will do for one night; I shall be off first thing to-morrow morning to the other side of England or possibly abroad."

Here was some information for the churchwarden. Luttrell was not then a parish priest but secretary or chaplain to some society, a professional preacher. Mr. Ranger wondered he had not thought of it before; the man's gifts and appearance fitted better with such a calling, he thought. He was interested to have learned so much, but would not hear of the preacher spending the night anywhere but under his roof. "My dear sir," he exclaimed, "I cannot possibly allow it. I insist that you give me the pleasure of your company. The only reason I did not press it before is that I imagined that you were going back to your friend."

But Luttrell declined the invitation. He said he would be pleased to come to supper, but for a dozen excellent reasons he thought it better that he should sleep at the *Bull* if that was the place Mr. Ranger recommended.

Mr. Ranger would not recommend any place at first, but in the end he gave way, Luttrell's reasons were so excellent or his manner of stating them so convincing. They walked on together with the matter settled to the satisfaction of both.

As they went Mr. Ranger gave Luttrell a good deal of information about the people of Gainsford. He knew the place well, having been in business there many years before he retired to the red brick



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house where he now lived, half way between the town and the old church.

"We find it a bit lonely at times," he admitted; "there are not many families about. It is nothing like so lively as when we lived in the High Street. We are some way from anywhere; I am afraid it is rather dull for my Helen. But she is a good girl, and she does not seem to care for gadding; her flowers and her needlework and pottering about after her old father amuse her, or she says they do."

"Does no one live between you and the old church?" Luttrell asked. "I suppose there was some sort of village at one time?"

But Mr. Ranger doubted it. "Gainsford was more of a place than it is now," he said. "A hundred years ago, before the river got so shallow and when goods came by water and not rail, it was quite a biggish place, but I doubt if there ever was much of a village out this way. I doubt if there was more than Curayl."

"But why the church?" Luttrell objected.

"Because of Curayl," Mr. Ranger answered, as if surprised at the question. "Curayl was here long enough before Gainsford was built or thought of, and Curayl of course must have a church, though I shouldn't think religion was ever much in their line."

Luttrell inquired if Curayl was both place and person.

Mr. Ranger told him it was. "At least there are the Curayls, their house has no name—it is theirs, that's all. The village, what there is of it, has no name; it is theirs too, and has been for hundreds of years, though it almost ceased to be when the major died. He had only a daughter, you know, but when she married she put her maiden name on



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to the end of her husband's, so the place actually belongs to the Goyte-Curayls now, not that Sir William troubles it much."

"Goyte?" Luttrell repeated. "You don't mean William Goyte, the speculator?"

"I believe he made his money in speculations," Mr. Ranger said; "at all events he has a great deal. If he had not Miss Curayl would not have married him—she could not afford to. The family has been poor for generations, and the major certainly did not mend matters."

"Goyte practically bought his title, and now——" But Luttrell did not finish the sentence aloud, there was no need. Mr. Ranger had plenty to say, and it was only to himself that he added, "Now he has bought his wife." It was Goyte's wife who had put the hypothetical case to him in the churchyard; he was certain now that it must have been. Of course he knew when she spoke that the case was not hypothetical, but that a reserved woman, obeying some sudden emotion, had asked him questions vital to herself. But he had taken the matter to be still undecided, and she hesitating to strike the bargain. He had answered her as he thought truly, brutally perhaps but truly, hoping to make the problem clearer and the decision easier to her. Fool that he had been. His answers must have cut deep, and whatever their truth, their brutality at least was evident.

So ran his thoughts while Mr. Ranger talked on about the Curayls. He had got past the major and his doings to the daughter.

"She was two and twenty when she married," he said; "that's four years ago. Her father was alive then, and it was said the match was his wish if not his making. I don't know, people will talk, though

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certainly Miss Curayl never gave them much to talk about; anyway she married Sir William and calls herself Goyte-Curayl, though people here always speak of him as Sir William Goyte and her as Mrs. Curayl, just as if they were not married. They have no children. I'm sure I don't know what the child would be called if they had one."

Mr. Ranger paused here for breath, and also to point out some distant landmark dimly seen in the dusk. But in a little he had started again on his theme, which was clearly one of local interest.

"Sir William is never here," he said. "Mrs. Curayl does not come often, though she is here just now. She was in church to-night—perhaps you saw her? She was in the front pew, very fair with dark eyes, but proud and cold and looking older than she is. People talk about her being such a beauty—and I don't deny she is handsome, though I always say, 'Handsome is as handsome does,' and it isn't much she does for Gainsford or Curayl. She has nothing to say to a living soul hereabouts, there's never so much as a garden party or a school treat at Curayl, there's not a penny spent in the place or on it, and the cottages belonging to her are a perfect disgrace. It is said, though, that that is not all her fault, there is something queer about the marriage settlements. Sir William paid off something for the major instead of settling a good round sum on his daughter, at least so they say. But I don't know the rights of it, people will gossip. Sunday evening's a bad time to be repeating all you hear and picking holes in your neighbours' skins too."

And there, as Luttrell showed no anxiety to pursue the subject further, it dropped, other things occupying the churchwarden's tongue. His favourite topic was his dear daughter Helen; she had heard

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the sermon that evening, so he told the preacher, but had gone on home with the housemaid instead of waiting for her father as usual—she was the most devoted of daughters, he only hoped she did not feel ill. He was still talking of Helen when they reached the house.

Everything about the Rangers' house, both outside and in, had a comfortable and substantial look ; the porch was roomy, the windows big and bowed, the very door scraper was of the sort to which one can tie a dog without any fear of his dragging it away. Inside the characteristics were even more marked : the dining-room, furnished in heavy mahogany, had it, and certainly it was not lacking in Mrs. Ranger and her Sunday silk and gold chain and lavender cap. There were portraits on the dining-room wall—they looked comfortable and substantial too ; there was Mrs. Ranger in her youth, her husband and his parents, and sundry little boys and girls who might have belonged to either side or both.

Helen Ranger sat at the opposite side of the table to Luttrell ; she was fair with serious gray eyes and a smile that was gravely sweet. He looked at her with a feeling akin to reverence ; he felt that her soul was as transparently fair as her skin.

"Will you ask a blessing, Mr. Luttrell ?" Mr. Ranger's voice recalled Luttrell from his speculation as to Helen's view of the world.

There was an almost imperceptible pause, then 'Benedictus benedicat per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum,' Luttrell repeated gravely, and if was not quite the grace expected it gave satisfaction—the Rangers were not inclined to be critical their preacher. People were not always as critical Luttrell as they ought to have been.

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Mrs. Ranger had not been to the evening service, and so was not under the glamour of the sermon, but she was at the outset attracted by the preacher. She said he was so homely, and though the epithet scarcely seemed to fit either his face or his well-made clothes of the severest High Church cut, it was the characteristic she liked and found, and she talked to him accordingly. She spoke of her family, her children grown up and her children dead, dwelling with particular fondness on one whose portrait hung opposite her. He was represented as a dark haired baby with eyes as blue as his shoulder knots and an amiably vacant expression.

"That," she said, "was my little Eddy; he was the finest boy I ever saw. He died when he was eight years old."

Luttrell looked at the portrait for the first time. "He must have been very like you," he remarked.

Mrs. Ranger seemed pleased. "Do you think so?" she said. "I was a brunette as a girl but my hair was never as dark as that. I don't think I was ever as clever as Eddy—if he had lived to grow up he would have been a great man. My other son never had Eddy's brains."

"Come, come, my dear," Mr. Ranger interposed, "you must not say that. A dead baby is always a mother's baby, Mr. Luttrell. I am sure George is as good a son as any one could wish."

"George is a very good boy," his mother allowed, "but he never had Eddy's spirit. Eddy was so audacious. Do you remember that Sunday?—let me see, it was in the spring, it must have been the spring before he died. I remember we had this very pudding for supper. We often have it on a Sunday, so often that George, when he comes over with his wife—we



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expected them to-day, it is a pity they could not come, I would have liked you to see him, and his little girl too. When he comes he always likes to have this pudding; he says it does not seem like Sunday without it."

And so on, Mrs. Ranger becoming reminiscent until she noticed that the guest's plate was empty, when she broke off to press him to have some of this special pudding. Helen had hardly spoken since they sat down to table; only when Luttrell addressed her did she answer him, and then she avoided meeting his eyes. He wondered a little why; she was not a child, she must have been three or four and twenty, and she did not seem exactly shy. But if she was silent her father was talkative enough. He told Luttrell all about Gainsford and its rector, the responsibilities of the churchwardenship and the troubles of the parish. Luttrell sympathized, and it was in this way that he first came to hear about the Waterside people, although Mr. Ranger hardly considered them part of the parochial responsibility.

"They don't belong to Gainsford at all," the old gentleman explained, "they are the Curayls' affair if they are anybody's. Why, by road the place is nearly two miles further from here than the old church. You can judge how far it is from Gainsford. It is absurd to expect the people there to look after it. It is bad enough for a rector—with a small living too—to include the cottages at Curayl in his parish without expecting him to look after every outlying nest of poachers."

From which Luttrell gathered that the rector of Gainsford when he was at home did not look after this particular nest, and that his loyal parishioners felt in duty bound to defend his action—or want of



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it—in his absence. “Who are these people?” he asked.

“Idle ne’er-do-wells,” Mr. Ranger answered. “Further on the river is still a bit navigable; of course there is no trade, that is a thing of the past. Some speculators tried to revive it at one time, thought there was a possibility of ship building and perhaps a little timber trade on the river, but it all came to nothing. The yards are still there and some of the houses, the rest have tumbled down. A good many people lost money over the venture. It is said a little of it stuck to the Curayls’ fingers, but concerning that I can’t say, it was long ago. All I know about the Waterside is that there are a collection of crazy old hovels and some idle good-for-nothing people. I don’t know how they live. Some of them are sailors, I think; at least they are reported to have gone to sea when they disappear for a time, but they may have gone to prison. Some few are said to work on the land. Beyond that I can’t say what they do, besides poaching and robbing hen-roosts. They are a perfect disgrace to the place, though I am proud to say their evil influence is not much felt by our people, they don’t have many dealings with the Waterside, they’d be ashamed to, and that’s the truth.”

Luttrell said that was a matter of congratulation; then he asked what Mrs. Curayl had to do with this unfortunate place, and why she was the only person to be held responsible.

“The people are her tenants,” Mr. Ranger explained; “all the land from the old church to ever so far is hers. It is not worth anything, a good deal of it is marsh, and what is not is worthless. Property hereabouts is none of it worth much. Gainsford is a place of the past, and farming, as you know, isn’t a



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fortune-making job ; but the stretch away beyond the old church is worse than useless. The Waterside is the only thing upon it that brings in a penny, and seeing what sort of people live there I don't suppose the income from them is much. However, the place is Mrs. Curayl's, and the people are her tenants, so I should say she is more responsible than any one else."

Luttrell agreed. " And Mrs. Curayl does not see it in that light, I suppose ? " he said. " And the Waterside is in a state of happy heathendom ? "

Mrs. Ranger sighed, and said it was a very sad state of affairs, and Mr. Ranger repeated his remark that it was absurd to expect the rector of Gainsford to interfere. " They are too far off," he said, " much too far off. Don't you think so yourself ? "

Luttrell said they did not seem to be exactly next door neighbours. He meant nothing but polite acquiescence by the reply, but as he spoke Helen looked up for a second and a faint colour dyed her cheeks, while the expression in her eyes was almost as if the words had conveyed some reproof to her. However she said nothing, and soon after they went to the drawing-room. Here Helen, at her father's request, sat down to the piano and played the evening hymn, and then some others. Luttrell leaned back in the corner where he sat. The scent of the garden, the dew-drenched stocks and mignonette, came in through the open window ; a faint breeze came too and stirred the feathers in Mrs. Ranger's nodding cap and swayed the lights on the piano so that the player had to lean forward to see, and Mr. Ranger, who joined his voice to hers for the closing verse, sang from memory. Luttrell watched, looking from the young face to the old one, and to the old lady who listened as she had listened hundreds of



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times before to the hymn that closed the peaceful Sunday. He did not himself join the singing, the pagan joyousness of his voice would have been out of place; so he listened, an appreciator who missed no detail.

Helen played on after the hymn was finished; the two old people sat in their easy chairs and dozed off to sleep under the influence of the music. Luttrell had moved nearer the piano. He was leaning back, his face in shadow, listening with complete enjoyment to the tender melancholy of Mendelssohn. Gradually the music ceased; he thought the player was halting to choose something fresh; he was considerably surprised when she asked in a low voice, "What do you think we should do?"

"About what?" he said, looking across at Mr. and Mrs. Ranger, and wondering if the question applied anyhow to them.

"The Waterside," she answered in the tone of one who is surprised that the question could be asked. "You pointed out plainly how wrong it was," she went on, nervously touching the keys. "I knew it before. I have often thought—'Here is evil at our very gates and I do nothing.' I have often thought of it, but until I heard you preach to-night I don't think I ever realized how narrow and selfish and cowardly it was to live as I lived, nor did I realize the danger to others and to myself too. It was like a prophet voice—you excused what I did just as I had excused it to myself a dozen times, in the very words almost, and then you threw the bright light of truth on the excuses and showed their weakness and the terrible consequences of the neglect and selfishness and cowardice."

Luttrell sat up and stared at her in speechless astonishment. But since he was in deep shadow



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she could not see the look and so went on, "I wish I knew what to do; perhaps you would help me though? I know I ought not to ask you about my little affairs. You said, too, every one must decide for himself and choose for himself what he shall do and how to do it. I will do it—I will try——"

Luttrell stopped her. "My dear young lady," he said earnestly, "for Heaven's sake be careful what you do! I was not preaching to you this evening, on my word I was not."

"No," she answered, "I know you did not mean it only for me. I am not so presumptuous as to think you had me specially in mind. But I am one of those you described."

"Yes, yes; that's just what I think myself. I remarked on it coming home, didn't I, Mr. Luttrell?" So said Mr. Ranger, speaking with the rapidity and entire oblivion to all that has gone before, peculiar to people just awake and anxious to appear very much so.

Luttrell rose. It was getting late for these good people, he was sure; and now that Mr. Ranger was fairly awake it would be impossible to have any further explanation from Helen. Besides, he thought it would be better to go. He did not know quite what she was talking about, but he was not sure that he wanted to know; indeed, he felt he had no right to hear, accordingly he said good-night.

Mr. and Mrs. Ranger seemed genuinely sorry for him to go, and genuinely anxious that he should come again.

"If ever you are this way you will be sure to come to see us," Mrs. Ranger said, and her husband seconded her.

Luttrell promised that he would. "Though I am afraid there is little chance of it," he added. "I



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shall be off early to-morrow morning. This is my first and probably my last visit."

He shook hands with Helen as he spoke. For a second she lifted her eyes. "I shall not forget," she said in a low voice; then she drew back, and even if he had the will to ask for an explanation he had not the chance. So he went without it, and walked down the garden path puzzling as to what she meant, and also as to which of his words she had so appropriated to herself.



CHAPTER III

“**M**Y ADOPTED AUNT,
“I have got myself into something of a hole. Knowing you to be the woman you are, and so above commenting on the obvious, I am certain that you will refrain from saying that such things have occurred before. This hole offers some new and unusual features; the most pleasing is that at present it is easy of egress. Unless something unforeseen happens I shall have the happiness of calling upon you in a day or two, labouring under no other disadvantage than a necessity to forbear visiting this part of the country again for a time.

“It really began this morning with my meeting Clifford, the last person one would expect to lead one astray. You never saw him, but you may remember my speaking of him. He is a serious minded man—he was serious years ago when I knew him at Cambridge. I misled him a little then, but nothing worse than a deviation from the track of theology into the by-ways of esoteric Buddhism and Persian mysticism. He revelled in it too—but that’s ancient history. I lost sight of him entirely—you know I do lose sight of people—and he, recreant knave, when he was left to himself threw up the teeming orient and returned to theology. When I stumbled across him to-day he had become, by a process of painful, though natural evolution, a High Church parson with a passion for duty.



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This did not prevent him welcoming me, and through the midday we renewed our youth, digging up old themes until such time as Clifford was obliged to start for some out-of-the-way place where he had to preach for a parson who was ill or away or something. The church was one of those little places where they have service about six times a year only; it was a long way from the headquarters of the parish to which it belonged, much further still from Clifford, seven miles or more. We started early, Clifford proposing to drive some way round so as to drop me at a convenient place. This part of the programme, however, was not fulfilled. His mare, a vicious little brute, dropped us both prematurely, in fact very soon after we started. I fell right way up, Clifford did not.

"Poor old chap, I am afraid he is a good deal hurt; concussion of the brain, the doctor fears, but that part of the affair will not interest you.

"I must tell you that Clifford attached a good deal of importance to the sermon he was going to preach. It seems there was likely to be at the church an individual whom Clifford had found out to be a remarkable sinner, though as far as I can understand no one else knew of the wrong-doing. Clifford would have no other chance of getting at him, so he intended to preach for his benefit on this occasion. Of course, having fallen out of the dog-cart on his head he could not do it, and though he was not really conscious when we got him home, the inability to preach seemed to prey on his mind. He wanted somebody to go, and of course there was nobody—parsons don't abound in the district, and I should have been put to it to find one if they did. Moreover not being in possession of his senses, and having that day renewed his old erroneous



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belief in my ability to do anything, he had got another idea into his muddled head—nothing less than that I must do the job he could not. Of course I agreed to quiet him. But it did not quiet him. Though I went out of the room he somehow knew I had not really gone. I don't know how he knew it, perhaps his spirit was half disembodied; there is scope for speculation here but little possibility of explanation—anyhow he knew and got excited. And seeing that I could do no good there, and seeing that a layman can read prayers as well as a churchman, also that I had an eloquent Irishman for a grandfather and the job wanted doing and some half hundred other excellent reasons—including the fact that I am myself and so rather liable to do things—seeing all this, it somehow came about that I went to the church aforementioned.

“I got into some of his clothes, took his canonicals with me, and rode off as hard as I could go. The mare behaves much better without shafts, and I got to the church not so very much after time. It is the perfection of a church, unspoiled Gothic, dusty banners in the roof, dark pews, low light, and everywhere a feeling of close of day. It is full of dreams and memories and half-told tales. Holding a service there is a sensation in itself.

“Did I preach? Of course I did. I had my subject chosen for me, you see, even a hint of a text. Clifford kept muttering some words, I could not quite make out what, but I remembered a text that fitted in with some of them, so I preached from that, though I doubt if it was the one he had in his mind. It was a disadvantage not knowing what sin I was to reprove, but I aimed widely, trying to arrange so that an average man might fit himself somewhere. And that is precisely what has hap-



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pened, somewhat painfully and not at all the way I wished. Two people have fitted themselves, one not a sinner and neither, I am pretty certain, the person aimed at.

"It is all the fault of the Irish agitator. He, if I remember what I was told, had a way of speaking so that every man in the crowd felt that he was individually spoken to, and consequently got the idea that the cause was his individual affair. Excellent when you want to make partisans, but not so desirable when you are preaching for a sinner. I am beginning to feel a little uneasy about that sermon. Mind, I said nothing I want to unsay or did not believe. I believe every word of it, and it would not hurt some other people if they believe it too. But I expected my share to end when I came down from the pulpit and it hasn't. I am going to leave here first thing to-morrow morning, and——"

But what else Luttrell was going to do was never written, for at that moment the landlord of the *Bull* came into the little parlour where he sat, to say that a man wanted to speak to him.

"What sort of a man?" Luttrell asked, with more than an inclination to say it was too late to see any one.

"A very disreputable party, sir," the landlord answered. He was quite of opinion that it was too late to see anybody—it was after half past ten; only out of deference to the clerical appearance of the guest was he himself still up without protest. "I don't believe he can be after no good, sir," he said confidentially. "I don't know him by sight, but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he was one of the Waterside people. If you take my advice, sir, you'll just send a message to hear what he wants and not see him."



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But Luttrell did not take his advice. Caution, not a paramount influence with him, fled at this description. "Perhaps I had better see him," he said. "Ask him to come in, will you?"

The landlord hesitated a moment. "I'll see he doesn't take anything," Luttrell said smiling, and the worthy man went out.

In a minute he returned with the undesirable caller, and Luttrell was bound to allow that the description was not all undeserved.

"Well, my man, and what do you want?" he said, assuming, it must be admitted, a somewhat professional manner.

The landlord had gone again, leaving the two together. However there was nothing of a secret nature about the man's errand. "Please, sir," he said with all respect, "there's a man dying and he wants yer."

"Me?" Luttrell said, and if he found the news rather overwhelming he concealed the fact. "I think you are mistaken. You do not want me. I am merely a chance comer, not the rector of the parish."

"Rector's not at 'ome," the man returned. "I've been to 's 'ome. There ain't no parson near but you. You wouldn't refuse the dyin', would yer, sir?"

There was something of a whine in the last words that did not escape Luttrell. "Where does he live?" he asked.

"Down by the Waterside."

"Do you live there too?" The man nodded, and Luttrell moved the lamp so that its light fell more fully on his visitor. "Tell me your name?" he said.

"Joe, Heward's Joe, or Joe Heward, if you like it better."

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The answer was given sullenly, Heward's Joe shifting uneasily as he spoke. He did not like to be observed, though more because he had an animal's instinctive objection to it than because he had anything to hide just now. "Joe's my name," he said, "and the man what wants you is Caser. Is there anything else you want to know?"

"Yes; what he wants me for, if he is a friend of yours——"

"He ain't; 'e's a friend o' some'n I know, at least 'e's lodgin' in 'er 'ouse—Mrs. Wythe's, I mean. I don't know 'im, but I count 'e's a pretty bad lot."

"Then why does he want a clergyman?"

"To tell 'im somethink," Joe admitted. "'Tisn't fer nothink religious," he went on apologetically, "it's no good me sayin' it is, though I dussay you could put in some prayin' when you got there. I don't see 'ow 'e's to 'elp that, but it ain't for that 'e wants you. 'E says, 'Fetch a parson, they're mostly gentlemen and sometimes honest men.' Them's 'is very words, sir; I shouldn't be usin' 'em else. 'E wants to leave some message, and 'e won't trust it to no one but a parson. That's what 'e wants you for. I wouldn't be callin' you out for that purpose myself, strike me if I would, but that's what 'e wants. Now you know you can do what you please erbout comin'."

Why Heward's Joe made this confession he did not know; it was not what he had expected to do at all, but then Luttrell was not what he had expected to find. Apparently the confession had the desired result, for the man who had hesitated to go to give the consolations of religion to the dying, rose at once when he heard what was really wanted of him.

Luttrell folded the unfinished letter and put it



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into his pocket. Then he went out with Joe without stopping to think that he might well be getting himself into further difficulties.

The way to the Waterside was long and lonely, at first by country lanes, afterwards across open land. It was a starlight night, warm and somewhat dark between the high hedges. There must have been a heavy dew; it was fragrant on the fields of seed clover, and once there was the smell of it on some cut corn that was waiting to be carried. Luttrell raised his head and drew in deep breaths of the sweet air. On either hand he heard the hundred stealthy almost indistinguishable sounds which make night companionable. He felt that it was companionable; that, as in the early days of creation, the earth was very good. He strode along forgetting all that had lately happened, looking up to the stars with a feeling of great satisfaction and enjoyment. Faster and faster he went, his spirits rising and the influence of the night calling up some inherent vagabond in him to the drowning of all thought of graver issues.

Once he stopped to listen to that sound which brings the goodly sense of solitude nearest to man. "Hark," he said to Heward's Joe, who suddenly reminded him of his presence by stopping too. "A white owl, the ghost of dead days."

The bird was not to be seen. By the sound of its cry Joe judged it to be hidden in some tree away on the left. His opinion of the man who had distinguished it so accurately went up.

"You ain't no townsman anyway, sir," he said.

Luttrell laughed. "Not when I can help it," he answered. "I shouldn't be surprised if I knew almost as much about the country after dark as you, and could take a hare sitting nearly as well."

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"I don't 'ave nothink to do with 'ares," Joe answered in an injured tone.

Luttrell looked round at the land which now spread bare and flat below them. "No?" he said, "I suppose this would not be a good part for them."

Joe laughed rather ruefully. "'Ow's a pore man to live?" he asked. "Mind, I don't say I do nothink dishonest."

"Of course not; we none of us say that. It is the other unkind people who do."

"Well, I don't, anyway," Joe repeated. "I don't say I'm ezac'ly Sunday School in my ways, but I know a plenty worse. Bless you, there's things as I could tell you'd make you jump."

Perhaps Joe wished to prove his words, perhaps his companion wanted to hear what he had to say; anyhow he began to tell of the things, though they were not all such as some would have chosen for clerical entertainment. But it is not the coat that makes the man, especially in the dark; and one cannot wonder if Joe forgot the cloth that Luttrell himself was in some danger of forgetting. They were on the best of terms by the time they reached the river, which they had to cross by an old bridge which looked now much too big. Luttrell paused to look down at the stream that ran low down in a winding channel it had cut for itself in the soft black ooze. He wondered how long it was since any craft of size had passed beneath the great arch to Gainsford. And then he wondered how long it would be before the bridge followed the vanished trade and fell away to nothing.

"Do you ever have floods here?" he asked, thinking that a full river would hasten the ruin that time and soft foundations would eventually make.



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"Not to say floods ezac'ly," Joe said; "river's a bit fuller o' winters, and o' course the tide makes a bit a difference. They feel the tide up beyont 'ere; it's runnin' out now. I remember one winter when we 'ad a deal o' rain, the river was pretty full then. I'll tell yer somethink that 'appened then," and he told, though the incident was more amusing than polite.

In time they came to the Waterside. The houses, dilapidated and old, were huddled close to the river, which having wound a devious course through the soft land seemed to have bent back to accommodate them. From a distance there looked to be scarcely half a dozen, but a nearer view showed the place to be of a greater extent, though even in that light it was clear that some of the crazy houses were mere shells and not inhabited at all. Luttrell looked about him as they found their way between the dark houses. Once Joe half paused; he had it in his mind to send the clergyman back with the errand unaccomplished. But before he had quite decided to speak, a window in a house on the right was opened and a woman looked out. "That you, Joe?" she asked.

Joe stopped, muttering something, and Luttrell turned to the dark doorway beneath the window. Joe stood irresolute. "I dunno as you wouldn't do better to go straight 'ome agin," he said in a low voice.

"Without seeing Caser? Why, man, that's what I've come for!"

"All 'er same, if you take my advice you won't do it," Joe returned, though he opened the door as he spoke and led the way by a narrow passage to a yard that lay behind. There were sheds or buildings of some sort round the yard; a light in



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a window opposite the doorway showed that some one was there, though that part of the house, only a single room thick, must have overhung the river.

Luttrell picked his way across the yard, which was littered with old timber, rotten baskets, and such like decaying rubbish. "Don't you think I can take care of myself?" he asked.

"I dussay," Joe answered, glancing towards the dark house as if he expected to be overheard. He sunk his voice a little—"If you wants to know what I thinks," he said, "I thinks you're a fool to go. They've got fever there."

But Luttrell either did not hear or did not heed, and a door beside them opened suddenly and brought Joe's confidence to a stop. An old woman looked out.

"Is this the gentleman?" she asked, flashing the light she held in Luttrell's eyes.

Luttrell answered that he was and she lowered the light.

"Come on then," she said in a manner made businesslike by her rapid inspection of him.

Luttrell followed her into the house, after which she shut the door, leaving Joe on the outside. Within, the place was close and evil-smelling and very still. The closing of the door seemed to completely shut off the outside world. Luttrell followed his guide into a small dark room; he could not see much of it, for they passed quickly through, but he knew there was a rat hole in the floor, for he put his foot in it. Mrs. Wythe, so he judged the old woman to be, opened a door at the end and went quickly down a narrow passage, swaying the lamp a little as she carried it so that its uneven light distorted her figure and made the surroundings all vague and obscure. The passage ended in two



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steep steps. As Luttrell stumbled up them he caught the first sound he had heard since he entered—a rapid muttering coming from behind a closed door. The words he could not distinguish, but the voice was thick and harsh, the speech too rapid for conversation. The next moment his guide had opened the door.

“Here you are,” she said, going in before him, “but you might a spared yourself the trouble o’ comin’, he’s clean off his head and don’t know no one.”

Luttrell followed her into the room, becoming aware as he did so of a sickening smell which it seemed one could almost feel with the hands. A bed stood in the corner, and on it lay a big man, gaunt and thin, yet with a face curiously swelled. A candle stood on a chair beside the bed, by its light he could see that the sick man’s head was shaved, and a deep almost purplish flush spread right up to where the hair should begin. For a moment he thought the old woman was right, and his journey was likely to be useless, for Caser lay muttering rapidly and glaring before him with fever-lit eyes, which saw things that were not there. But at the sound of Mrs. Wythe’s voice he roused himself.

“I know you old—” he croaked between black cracked lips. “Go to hell with you. Turn ’er out, mister.”

Luttrell opened the door which the old woman had carefully shut.

She looked over her shoulder at him. “I’m not goin’,” she said. “You can shut that.”

Luttrell did not obey. “I hope you will oblige us,” he said, and held the door open with exaggerated courtesy.



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"You don't want to be lef' alone with a man off his head, do you?" she asked.

Luttrell said that he did, and the sick man, with a volley of abuse, ordered her to go. "You sold yerself to that old devil," he said; "d'y' think I'd ever let it come to your clutches? No fear, 'e'd get it if I did, even if you 'ad to take it down to hell to 'im." And with several asseverations he informed her that he should not say a word while she was there, if he died with the message unspoken.

"You see," Luttrell said smoothly, "what has to be told cannot be told in the presence of a lady. If you would be so good as to leave us for ten minutes."

Mrs. Wythe put her back against the wall. Long ago she had known a man who used this suave politeness of address. He was a well-born man but a very bad one. [This man was not the same; she knew that at a glance, but she also knew how much his politeness was worth. "I ain't goin'," she said firmly. "I shan't move."

Luttrell left the door. "In that case," he said, "I must ask you to allow me to move you," and taking her gently but firmly by the arm he put her outside the door; then he handed out the lamp, and almost before she had realized what had happened he had shut and bolted the door on the inner side.

She rattled the lock and demanded to be let in, but he took no notice. Having seen that the door was secure he came to the bed. "Well, what is it?" he asked the man who lay there.

"Feel here," was the answer, muttered low. "Be quick, down my neck. Look sharp, I can't 'old 'out much longer, light's been goin' like mad all night; there're twenty devils racin' round



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now. Let 'em race. D'y' 'ear me? Go it, you cripples; go it if you like. I kep clear till I'm rid of it."

The harsh croaking voice rose with a relief that was almost triumph as Luttrell, obeying the command, felt a string about the man's neck. A small wash-leather bag, roughly made but tightly sewn up at the mouth, was fastened to it. Luttrell took it off. It was damp with perspiration and saturated with the smell which made the room so unendurable.

"What am I to do with it?" he asked.

For a moment Caser did not answer. He was muttering to himself, his mind evidently wandering again. Luttrell stood with the little bag in his hand, waiting till he should be able to concentrate the wandering faculties. "What am I to do with this?" he repeated.

"Do?" Caser answered. "Do? Why, damn it, give it her, of course! Give it as it is, mind; don't open it; swear you won't open it. You'll be stealin' it next if you see it."

This last comment was an aside. Probably the man was not aware he had spoken it aloud. Luttrell did not think it worth answering.

"To whom shall I give this?" he asked.

But Caser was still concerned for the safety of the thing. "Swear you won't open it," he repeated. "Give it as it is—promise."

Luttrell promised. "Now who is it for?" he asked.

"Give it to her—tell her—Come close——" He tried to catch Luttrell's sleeve with his restless fingers but they refused to obey his will. Luttrell put the candle on the floor and sat down beside the bed, stooping low to hear. "I'll tell you what to say," Caser said, speaking confidentially, "but

raised his voice as if he heard at the door. She had ceased and she did not answer now, the vile abuse to her.

Luttrell waited a little; the message?" he asked.

But either the excitement or fever had clouded the brain and no answer, but went on speaking as if she had been there, gradually and more incoherent, till once more to himself and picking restlessly at the pane.

Luttrell leaned back. His must mind would probably clear again must wait and see, he had not gone. Just then he heard a sound or rustle as if some one rose from a chair then a malicious laugh. "I wonder Mrs. Wythe's voice informed him to each other—and the devil—as much good may it do you! I'll be troubled, mister. You can say you while he's tellin' tales to the devil!"



CURAYL

administer, but there was nothing. The place was bare even of furniture except for the bed and chair and candlestick. He went to one of the two windows; it was uncurtained and looked into the yard but was not made to open. "We may as well have air, at least," he thought and crossed to the other. The boards creaked beneath his step, sounding hollow, and from below there came the soft *lap, lap* of water. He guessed that he must be in the part of the house that was built on piles and overhung the river. He opened the shutter and looked out; the stream ran below, dark and sluggish near at hand, but quicker moving out in the centre where the broken reflection of the stars seemed to be hurrying down to the sea on the outgoing tide. The air that came in was but unsavoury, smelling of river slime, but it was preferable to that which was within the room. He looked round to see if the comparative freshness made any difference to the man on the bed. It did not; he still lay muttering and talking to himself, though with gradually lessening energy and rapidity. By degrees he grew quieter and quieter, until at last he lay quite still.

Luttrell took the light and came to the bedside. "Can you give me the message now, old man?" he asked. But there was no answer, only a rattling sound as Caser drew slow difficult breaths. Luttrell held the light lower and looked at the darkly flushed face and the wide open staring eyes, then he went to the door. "Mrs. Wythe!" he called. "Mrs. Wythe!" and then doubting if that was her name—"I say!"

His voice went sounding down the dark passage, then sank into the greasy silence. He stood listening a moment, but there was no sound and no answer.



CURAYL

He went back, took another look at the unconscious man, then fetched the light and started to find help. Down the passage he went and into the little dark room through which he had come earlier ; but there was no one there, no sign of any one. In one corner he found a door which gave on to a steep stair ; he opened this and went up, picking his way carefully, for the timbers were old and rat-eaten. At the top he found that the stairs led straight into a room. There was no door or rail ; the well of the staircase was a dark gap in the floor. In this room there were old sea chests and a four post bed, but no one in it. He looked all round, even stopping to search in dark corners in case any one was hiding there ; but there was no one, no one at all. So he passed on and came by a low doorway to a second room, a mere garret where there was nothing but old boxes and sacks that looked as if they might be stuffed with rags. There was a small window, and, unlike the one in the other room, which was closely shuttered, it was unglazed and open to the sky. He looked out and again saw the river below ; this room, then, was above the one where Caser lay. As he stood there, the all-pervading silence was suddenly broken by a peal of laughter ; harsh and eerie it rang, sounding strangely in that deserted house. He listened, feeling for a moment that the sound was not of this world ; then he turned and retraced his steps quickly, for he guessed the origin of the laugh. It was not truly of this world, it was the laugh of a man who has almost crossed the border, and whose jest is with the phantoms of the past or the dim future that looms darkly near.

When Luttrell came back to the room that overhung the river he found Caser muttering again as



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before, talking rapidly and tossing to and fro. For a little he remained so, then gradually the delirium passed and he sank once more into stupor. Luttrell watched beside the bed for a time, but there was no further change, only the breathing became more difficult and the pulse more feeble. At last he rose and stood looking at the inanimate figure. "I'm afraid you've said all you're going to say this side of the grave," he said. "I had better go out and look for help, it would be more useful than stopping here."

He set the candle in a safe place and went out, leaving the door open so that he should have some little light. He found his way down the passage, through the room beyond and out into the yard. It was so dark out here that he stumbled among the old rubbish for some minutes before he came to the door by which he had originally entered. This was shut, and he half expected to find it locked; however it was not, perhaps it was too old and crazy to be securely fastened. He opened it and stepped out into the roadway, almost on top of a man who seemed directly outside the door.

It was very dark just here, the houses cutting off what little light the stars might give. Neither of the two who had come thus together could see the other, but instinctively each gripped the other firmly, Luttrell silently, the other with an explosive and somewhat strongly expressed indignation.

Luttrell suddenly let go his hold; the precaution was needless. The man was of his own class, and consequently in all probability of the medical profession. "Hold on a minute, doctor," he said, laughing, "you're the very man I want."

The doctor's hand dropped suddenly. "Who the devil are you?" he asked, peering up in the gloom.

CURAYL

"A man in the devil of a fix," Luttrell answered. "I was brought here to take a dying man's message and then left with the dying man on my hands. I wish you would come and see him."

"Where?"

"Just behind, an old rat-hole overhanging the river."

"Humph, Mrs. Wythe's. I didn't know she had got a lodger. Come on."

Luttrell led the way back to the empty house, the doctor following him. They came to the room where the man lay. It was just as Luttrell had left it, the last of the candle guttering and flickering in the draught from the open door.

On the threshold the doctor paused, noticing the evil smell of the place. It told his practised senses something which it had not told Luttrell, and he glanced quickly at his companion. "Do you know what you have been let in for?" he asked.

"More than I reckoned," Luttrell answered, thinking of several things unknown to the other.

The doctor crossed the room and came to the bedside. "I can't do anything," he said after a rapid examining look, "it is only a matter of time."

Luttrell was not surprised. "So I expected," he said. "Still, you will wait for the end?"

"Of course," the doctor answered, "we must wait. There is no reason, though, why you shouldn't wait outside if you prefer it."

"Thanks," Luttrell replied, "I would rather stay here."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said, "I ought to tell you that this is a case of typhus."



CHAPTER IV

THE night was far advanced when Luttrell and Dr. Tollinger turned their backs on the Waterside. They did not leave until after Caser was dead, nor until Mrs. Wythe had been found and had heard the doctor's opinion of her and her doings, expressed with more force than politeness. After that, and after making sundry necessary arrangements, Dr. Tollinger announced himself ready to go. Luttrell left with him. For a little they walked in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. Luttrell's were centred on the packet he had received, and the chance of the doctor's being able to give him some clue to the identity of the woman for whom it was meant. Tollinger, on the other hand, was thinking solely of his companion. In the long half-hour they had spent together by the dying man, he had looked at him until he knew every detail of his clerical dress and unclerical face. It was like a parson, he had told himself. to stay from a sense of duty in an infected room, where he could do no good. But this parson had offered neither prayers nor protests, and was now walking beside him without making any propositions as to the best thing to be done under the present circumstances.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Tollinger asked gruffly at last.



CURAYL

"Do?" Luttrell returned. "Find the woman, I suppose."

The doctor was mystified. "What woman?" he said.

That was precisely what Luttrell did not know. "I would be pleased to tell you if I could," he said; "as it is, I am in hopes that you will be able to tell me. Some woman for whom the man Caser gave me a packet—that was before you came in, though, so naturally you don't know anything about it. He gave me something, I don't know what, for some woman, I presume a relative or some one he is fond of. Can you give any guess as to who it would be?"

Tollinger shook his head. "I don't know anything about the man or his affairs, he is a stranger to me. Possibly Mrs. Wythe could tell you."

"But possibly she won't," Luttrell said, "she—unless I am much mistaken—not being given to an extravagant use of the truth, especially where she has hopes that there is something sticking to a lie. Caser gave me this packet to deliver unopened, and he was evidently anxious that Mrs. Wythe should not finger it."

As he spoke he showed the little bag.

Dr. Tollinger took it for a moment. "Something in paper inside," he said. "Feels flat, as if it were a locket or a medal, though it's biggish for that." Then as he gave it back he added: "I should advise you to be careful how you handle it till it has been disinfected; it should be pretty poisonous by now. By the way, that brings us back to the starting point. What are you going to do?"

"About the fever?" Luttrell asked. "I don't know. What do you advise?"

"You ought to be quarantined," Tollinger said. "Are you nervous?"



CURAYL

"Of developing it myself? Bless your soul, man, no! I never catch anything, not even influenza or trains. I'll be quarantined if you like, though it would be decidedly inconvenient. Can't I be boiled in carbolic or something?"

"You could be disinfected," the doctor told him, "but that would be no guarantee that you would not develop the fever and become a source of danger to others. If you like, I will overhaul you and tell you what I think of your chances of escape; though I warn you no one can really tell, and, in any case, if we did our duty conscientiously, into quarantine you would go."

"Conscience never was my strong point," Luttrell said cheerfully. "Doctor, you're a brick. Where shall the overhauling take place? It is a bit dark out here, though at this time private enough for anything," and he looked with appreciation at the wide land that curved away on either side. "It is a fine place," he said.

His companion grunted. "You had better come home with me," he said. "I live alone not far from here."

Luttrell agreed, and they walked on in silence. After a little, however, he remarked. "The good people of Gainsford don't know of the fever at the Waterside."

"They don't know anything and don't care either," Tollinger said shortly. "It is no one's business, certainly not mine; if I wasn't a fool I should never have been drawn into it."

"The same applies to me," Luttrell said, but he did not enter into particulars. "Are you sure that it is typhus? I thought one seldom met with such a thing now."

"One doesn't often," Tollinger admitted, "but



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they have got it down by the Waterside. I don't know how; some one imported it, I suppose, perhaps this Caser. Anyhow it is there, and it is a place where it might take hold. I saw a couple of suspicious cases yesterday. I had my doubts about them then, but there was no room for doubt about Caser, and after him I feel pretty safe in naming the others too. I dare say there will be more in a day or so."

"If there are, what will happen?" Luttrell asked.

"Don't know," the doctor answered laconically. "I am not the local practitioner, I only came out here to spend a few weeks studying the coleoptera of the district. If I had not been a philanthropic fool I should not have started prescribing for the Waterside."

Just then they rounded a bend of the track and came to a cottage that stood in a slight hollow. "This is where I live," Tollinger said, and led the way in.

It was a little old plaster-built place and inside the appointments were of the plainest. If Tollinger had not taken it furnished from some peasant owner he had certainly not troubled to supply himself with the luxuries of life. The only things Luttrell noticed as not being the strictest necessities were a supply of books, mostly on entomological subjects, and a fine microscope.

"I am quite alone here," the doctor explained. "An old woman comes from a cottage a mile further down the road to see to things of a morning. Should typhus really break out at the Waterside I expect she will be afraid to come."

Luttrell expected it too; though, as he said, they were some distance from the place.



CURAYL

"That won't make any difference," the doctor said. "Shall I give you an opinion on your chances of immunity?"

"If you please, and afterwards as much disinfectant as you have to spare. I assure you I am a perfectly safe person."

Eventually Dr. Tollinger came to something of the same opinion, although, as he told Luttrell, it was a subject on which no one could speak with certainty. However he provided him with disinfectant and they agreed that the meeting of the night should be entirely ignored. After that the doctor offered his guest a bed. Luttrell thanked him, but before he went upstairs he said, "I wish you would tell me something about Mrs. Wythe. I have got to find Caser's woman somehow to give her the packet. Mrs. Wythe seems the only clue at present."

"She isn't much good," Tollinger said, filling his pipe. "As you said yourself, she won't tell the truth if there is any advantage in a lie."

"Who is she?"

"Don't know. She seems to have lived a caravan life at one time, but she has been settled down here for years now, so I have been told. I don't know what she does or has done, she has the name for being the most undesirable person at the Waterside. As for the man Caser, I never heard of his existence till you took me to him to-night. Maybe some of the Waterside people could tell you."

Luttrell doubted that. It was evident Joe Heward knew nothing of him.

"Umph!" the doctor said when he heard it, "that sounds as if he were a stranger. I don't know what he should have come for, unless he wanted to be quiet a little, and from some past



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acquaintance with Mrs. Wythe thought her able to shelter him."

"Or unless he had come to look for his woman," Luttrell suggested.

The doctor admitted that might be the case and turned over the little bag which had been disinfectcd. "What are you going to do with it?" he asked.

"Find her if I can and give it to her," Luttrell answered. "I must; the thing was committed to me."

Tollinger smoked without comment. He had nothing to do with a clerical conscience, nor did he see the necessity for pointing out the difficulties in the way of fulfilling the behests of this one.

There were difficulties in the way; Luttrell himself saw that plainly. He reviewed them as he undressed, and came to the conclusion that he should have to spend at least part of the next day making inquiries at the Waterside. This conclusion, annoying as it was, did not prevent him from sleeping soundly and late.

When he awoke the sun was shining into his little room, and through the open window there came the damp yet pleasant smell of the marsh. He went to look out. All round the marshland stretched, brown and bronze and green, softening to purplish blue in the distance, near at hand touched with more distinct colour, pink where a patch of firm ground gave hold to heather roots, emerald green where the soil was softest and the treacherous bog weed grew. There were no shapes, no distinct outlines, only colour and slow moving shadow beneath a wide sky. No sound either but the trickle of some stream that threaded its invisible way in a deep channel it had cut for itself in the marsh.



CURAYL

Luttrell looked out of the window and rejoiced in the breadth and silence and sunshine. He began to whistle softly. The house was very quiet—Dr. Tollinger was probably out looking for beetles and the old woman gone at this hour. He began to dress, singing loudly now that he felt sure he had the house to himself. Dr. Tollinger, coming back across the marsh to see if his guest were up, heard the singing. On the doorstep he paused to listen —

He who loved star and sun,
Loved rest when toil was done,
Was but a homely one—
Christ of Galilee !

Friend of wayfaring men,
Not beyond earthly ken,
Wept with us, laughed with us now and then—
Christ of Galilee !

So the voice sang with a light-hearted happiness that sorted curiously with the words but was nevertheless very infectious. Tollinger came in and put his collecting case upon the table noiselessly. The voice above stopped, though in his ears he still heard the ringing, dancing tune with its woof of gladness and its warp of half-felt pain. For a minute or two he listened and heard nothing, then suddenly the singing started again, coming nearer—

Light of wise and foolish, He,
Making all blind eyes to see,
Showing us the service free—
Christ of Galilee !

The last came like a burst of joy, for Luttrell opened the door which shut in the staircase at that moment, and discovered the doctor.

CURAYL

It is hard to say which was the more disconcerted, singer or listener. Tollinger was clearly ashamed to have been found listening so intently, and Luttrell it seemed was almost equally ashamed to have been caught singing the verses. He recovered himself first, but that was because he was more master of a situation.

"Here's a disgraceful time to put in an appearance," he said. "I hope I have not upset your housekeeping entirely."

"Not at all," Tollinger returned shortly. "Breakfast's in the kitchen," and he led the way there.

During the meal Luttrell unfolded his plan of going back to the Waterside to make inquiries as to Caser's antecedents and relations. The doctor did not altogether approve of it, but as he could suggest nothing better Luttrell decided to try it.

"When I have done all I can," he said, "I shall go straight to the nearest station and there'll be an end of the matter, I hope."

"Tollinger nodded; then he asked—"What about the people you were staying with? Won't they wonder what's become of you?"

Luttrell thought they would not. "I was not any one's guest," he said. "I was only at the *Bull*, and I told them there I should very likely not come back. It was late when I started for the Waterside. I told them not to sit up, for if the visit took any time I should go straight to the station at Gainsford. There is a mail train goes through in the small hours of the morning. I settled with mine host before I left, and told him to send my robes of office to the rectory at Ashly if I did not turn up."

"That was a pretty mad thing to do," the doctor observed. "If you had happened to get a knock on



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the head at the Waterside no one would have been the wiser."

"Or the worse?" Luttrell suggested. "I often do mad things; nothing comes of them. I tell you what: 'taking thought for the morrow' is a bit of a mistake, it does away with some of the zest of existence."

"It keeps one out of tight places."

Luttrell was obliged to admit that to be true. "But there are worse places than tight ones," he said, "at least I think so, and I've tried one or two," and after that they talked of past experiences.

The doctor talked the most, but Luttrell recounted some of his adventures. It was not till afterwards that Tollinger came to think that they were somewhat unusual to have befallen a clergyman; not impossible, still unusual. But then the man himself was unusual; indeed, in spite of the constant reminder of his dress, Tollinger found it hard to remember his profession.

Directly he had finished breakfast Luttrell started for the Waterside. Tollinger pointed out the way, telling him to keep to the road, as the foot-paths seldom proved short cuts for strangers. After that he took his collecting box and went to look for beetles. All the forenoon he spent hunting amongst the low growing weeds, much absorbed in his work, but soon after mid-day he went back to the cottage. Luttrell had promised to look in on his way back from the Waterside. As it happened, however, he was late, so late that the doctor was beginning to fancy he was not coming after all, when he heard his step outside.

He was busy setting some new specimens when Luttrell entered. He did not look up. "Done any good?" he asked.

...a pretty good specimen,
"I have been looking for that :
was lucky to get him—found him
he never ought to have been, too

They admired the beetle for a
doctor asked, "What did you learn

"Among other tales that Cas

"Well, that might have been.

"Too old. He was fifty, and
not more than sixty."

"I don't see how you can tell,
jected. "You did not see the man
besides, he might very well be y
looked."

"I am pretty certain that he
said, "in spite of Sapphira's circum-
of his birth and childhood, earl
lamentable loss of wife and child.
from her tale that the poor fellow v
the world except for her, his old
consequently his natural heir. I c
her that under those sad circumst
be heir, and so had better go to a la
the case. Magnificent if she did, e
I would do it in her place."



CURAYL

"A dead man sometimes shows his age more truly than a living one; also, unless I am much mistaken that one has more than a dash of negro in him, and Mrs. Wythe assured me that her late husband was a pure-bred Englishman."

"Have you been looking at the body?" Tollinger demanded. "Then you are a fool! What the devil—What is the good of all the disinfecting fuss last night if you go and handle that corpse this morning?"

"Not much," Luttrell admitted; "but it couldn't be helped, and after all does not so much matter. I've been to see Joe Heward, and he has got the fever, I'm afraid. Will you walk up and see him by and by, unless of course you have decided to have nothing to do with the business."

The doctor snorted. "Has Joe got fever?" he asked.

"I'm afraid so. I went to see if he could tell me anything of Caser or Sapphira and found him bad. I set his house in order for him a bit and sent his children to a neighbour. His wife, I suppose, is dead; she didn't appear on the scene. At present I don't fancy the Waterside people quite realize what they're in for. They seem to think the fever is a variation of the low fever they say they get most autumns. When they do realize it there will be trouble, I expect."

The doctor began to put his things together. "You are going to Joe?" Luttrell asked.

"I have no choice," Tollinger returned gruffly. "The nearest practitioner lives on the other side of Gainsford; he can't rush to and fro to the Waterside, even if he would. And being a married man with a decent country practice he wouldn't do it, couldn't, in fact; it's out of the question for him."



CURAYL

Luttrell nodded. "Just so," he said. "Now for arrangements."

"What arrangements? I have none to make."

"Wouldn't it be advisable to write to the local authorities or Board of Guardians, or whatever Bumble calls himself in this part and tell him you have got typhus here and will keep it? You might ask for a nurse and anything else you want, a good deal more than you want, so that you can do on the half you may get. You could warn him to keep clear too. He'll do that, I fancy."

"I shan't do anything of the sort," Tollinger said. "It's a waste of time."

"It is rather," Luttrell agreed, not without some truth, for at that time there were neither so many district councils nor district nurses as there are now. In an out-of-the-way place the power of the local authorities was as much name as fact then, and no one in office objected to a philanthropic busy-body undertaking any nasty job that wanted doing. Luttrell knew this when he suggested the arrangements; Tollinger knew it too when he objected to them.

"I'm not going to bind myself down to see this business through," he said.

"Perhaps not," Luttrell agreed. "Just say you have done all you are in a position to do, and as it is no further affair of yours you report the matter to them. That will do just as well; they will hold committee meetings and eventually find that it is also no affair of theirs, beyond their authority, and so must be reported on to the proper powers. In the meantime the people will die and you will——"

"A good thing too," Tollinger snapped. "There ought to be a fever hospital."



CURAYL

"I suppose there isn't?"

There was not anywhere near. Tollinger said so and looked about for some paper. When he had found it he sat down to the table and began to write. Luttrell sat opposite him, and taking a partly finished letter from his pocket-book also began to write.

The doctor had got no further than the second line when he remarked, "The thing's bound to spread; the people'll bolt when they realize what it is."

"We ought to be able to prevent that," Luttrell answered without looking up.

"We?" Tollinger said. "What have you to do with it?"

"I'm in quarantine."

"You're in—Do you mean you are going to stop and see this thing through?"

"I can't help myself. I'm in quarantine for handling a dead body."

Tollinger looked doubtfully at the man. His heart warmed towards him as it had done before, yet the severe black coat irritated him and made him distrustful of his own instincts.

"I don't know whether you look at this business from a religious point of view," he grumbled. "If so, I warn you there won't be room for much of that sort of thing. If typhus gets a proper hold at the Waterside there won't be much time to trouble after souls and all that."

Luttrell looked up. "Souls are not very much in my line," he said. "I'm a deal more at home with bodies. I can clean a house, mind another man's business, harangue a crowd and lay out a corpse if need be, and I'll do all of them or anything else in a small way while I am in quarantine. Is that what you want?"



CURAYL

Apparently it was, for Tollinger grunted an approval, though he did say, "You will take care that I don't forget that you are a priest for all that."

Luttrell laughed. "It does not seem to be an altogether easy thing to remember," he said, then he returned to his letter. It was the one he had begun at the *Bull* last night. He went on much where he had left off when Joe's coming had interrupted him, although he did not trouble to complete the last unfinished sentence.

"I withdraw all I wrote about the get-outableness of this hole. I am in, miles deep, far beyond any hope of immediate extrication. It becomes interesting, almost exciting, but like other interesting things it takes time, so don't expect me to pay that promised call for a long time. If the next news you hear of me is in a police report do not be entirely surprised.

"Yours as always,
"A."



CHAPTER V

BEATRICE CURAYL sat alone in her room. The silence of Sunday evening lay over the old house of Curayl, and over the dark landscape that was spread below her windows ; or perhaps it was her fancy that found an almost painful Sabbath calm for the place, for within and without it was always quiet in these days. It was late now ; the man who had preached that night was already on his way to the Waterside, forgetful, for the time being, of the questions that had been put to him in the churchyard, and of the questioner too. But she did not forget ; as she sat alone she remembered very well, and, remembering, wondered how she had been betrayed into putting them.

She had never before said such things to a living soul, never even allowed the possibility of them. Why had she spoken of them to a stranger ? By what magic had he first revealed them to her and afterwards caused her to lay them bare to him ? She had never asked herself the questions she had asked him that night ; even when, as a girl, she decided her fate, she had not admitted their existence. She had not then asked herself if it were right or wise, if she were justified ; the thing had to be done, so there was neither room nor need for question. She was obliged to marry a rich man for



CURAYL

the sake of her father and the honour of the name she prized so highly. Sir William Goyte was a rich man ; he offered and she took him, that was all. There was no sacrifice ; she had nothing to sacrifice, neither dream nor ideal nor love. It was a business transaction, nothing more—a bargain, as the preacher had said. As the word occurred to her she wondered again how she had ever come to speak to him as she did. She pushed the window wider and looked down into the garden below ; sweet scents of flowers came up to her, the smell, too, of overgrown vegetation steeped in dew. It was too dark to see anything, but she knew how it all looked, how ill-kept it was. Sir William spent little on the place, and was careful that she should do the same. In that way at least the marriage had not done what she had hoped ; it had done what it had undertaken though, fulfilled to the letter, as a business contract should. The preacher had spoken of it as a business contract, nothing more, nothing less ; a bargain which, once struck, should not be repudiated by either party. As if she would repudiate it, or ever go back on her word ! She grew angry that one should have said such a thing to her.

Yet in spite of her anger she began to go over other things the preacher had said and compare them with the experience of her married life. It had been hard, that experience ; hard in a way she had not anticipated ; perhaps, too, harder than she had anticipated. The yoke had galled her incessantly ; in a thousand ways the man who had married her restricted her, bound her, brought home to her the fact that she was not free but bought with a price. Perhaps, too, the bargain had been badly made, for though the absolute price had been paid, she herself was utterly dependent on his bounty, enriched or beggared by



CURAYL

his favour, like a Circassian slave or worse. The preacher had spoken as if the wedding ring made little difference in the honour of such a contract as hers. She had been angry at the time, resenting the liberty of his speech as an insult, but it was true; she had not admitted it before, yet it was that which galled her most perhaps. The price had been paid to her father, not settled on her. It was necessary; she saw it at the time, she saw it still, but it made her position painfully like the woman without the wedding ring, dependent on Goyte's bounty, kept by his munificence. If he had been a gentleman perhaps it would have been easier; she had not realized how little of a gentleman he was when she made the bargain. Perhaps he had not realized quite what she was either; even that argument cut both ways it seemed. It was hard to learn it and suffer for it afterwards. "Hard but just" the preacher had said in his sermon. "You must allow for consequences being greater and spreading further than you foresee, you must risk that when you set out to do that which conscience and accumulated experience calls into question."

She rose hastily and shut out the silent beautiful night. She was angry with the man who had put these things into words and who had shown justice and called it in mockery, "the mercy of the Lord." She went to bed, and the last thing before she slept remembered yet other of the man's words, that which he had said about the debt to the generations yet to come, and she rejoiced that there was no child of this marriage to come after her in the old house of Curayl.

Morning came clear and fresh, with a film of mist on the low land, and a delicate freshness in the air, which settled soon into the heat of an August day.

... of will, and her soul
and she her normal self prepared
mands that might be made upo
across the dewy lawn to the mo
rounded two thirds of the house ;
here, and beyond, down a winding w
garden not at all in keeping with th
Time, however, which had not in t
kind to the Curayls, had done wha
Italian garden ; the broken bal
vases and overgrown terraces had
rest well enough now. There we
over the cracked masonry, little pi
bloomed late and early and survive
specimens that had once beautif
Beatrice trained back some luxur
gathered a handful of flowers bef
doors to fetch her books and e
hours she would read, following s
study ; for hours sit at needlewo
close and fine as women did long

In such occupations was her tin
rare visits to Curayl. Strange little
the visits seemed, in the discord of
not but feel grateful to



CURAYL

in a measure like going back into her girlhood to be there.

So the days passed until there came the news of the fever at the Waterside.

At Gainsford the accounts and rumours were somewhat garbled and various, though in the course of time three things came to be pretty generally believed. That it was not the business of any one in Gainsford. That the accounts were much exaggerated, if not originated in nothing worse than a few bad but isolated cases of scarlet fever. And that it would be a thousand pities to give the disease, whatever it was, a chance of spreading by having any communication with the place. It was known that Dr. Tollinger, a qualified practitioner though a stranger, had taken the matter in hand. Some authorities supplied a nurse, and in the course of time the people of Gainsford made a small collection for the sufferers. Luttrell's name did not figure in the reports; few would have recognized it even if they had heard it; no one knew that the preacher was still in the neighbourhood. Obviously the Waterside was not Gainsford's business.

At Curayl, however, things looked rather different. For one reason it was nearer the affected place, and so got the news sooner and had a more personal interest in it. The servants at the house of Curayl talked a good deal about the epidemic, and a certain amount of what they said came to Beatrice's ears.

"I will find out what truth there is in these reports," she said, and did so, only to be faced with a problem indeed. The people were her tenants; the fever was fostered if not caused by the conditions under which they lived, conditions for which she was more or less responsible. Plainly it was her duty to do all in her power to help. But how? She



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had nothing, and money was a necessity. Her husband took care that she should have the control of little more than pocket-money; what she wanted beside she had to ask for, from him. She would have to ask him for help for these people. Beyond the necessary repairs at Curayl itself he would neither spend on her property nor let her spend. But this was not an ordinary case, it was common justice and charity, and had nothing to do with improving the property. So she wrote to him, putting the case simply and asking his help. She did not like doing it, but she did not expect him to refuse.

However he did refuse. She had used the wrong arguments, as he plainly showed her. "With regard to charity," he wrote, "I do not feel bound to contribute to the charities with which you happen to sympathize at the moment. I prefer to choose which I will support myself. As to justice, I cannot see what claims your tenants have on me. Long ago I urged you to evict the lot; you refused; I am hardly responsible for the consequences." There was a little more to the same effect before he concluded by suggesting that she had better leave Curayl before the fever spread there, or fear of it frightened the servants away.

Beatrice read the letter through slowly, then she read it again. She had asked in the name of charity and justice, and he had answered both pleas and refused, and there was some truth in his arguments from his point of view. She saw that and knew that; though she had urged the two reasons, she had really expected him to grant the request because she asked it quite as much as for their sake. He looked upon it as a favour and she had asked as something of a right. Oh, the weariness of having to ask for everything and to remember always the forms to be



CURAYL

observed in the approach ! If she had coaxed perhaps ? But she could not coax. Or pleaded with tears and smiles and perhaps the wiles of a becoming gown and a good dinner—the artifices of the woman without the ring. Her cheeks flamed at the thought, and for a moment she almost hated the man for her humiliation.

But something had to be done, and done quickly. In her mind she ran over her possessions, but she had nothing of value that he had not given her. Her mother's jewellery had never come to her ; even in those days the major had been too pressingly in need of money. One thing of value only had she ever owned, given into her possession by her mother's dying hand, cherished as her chiefest treasure for many years, but gone now. The manner of its going was a story she told to no one ; her face hardened now as the memory of it flashed into her mind. She resolutely put it from her, and began to look at such of her husband's presents as she had with her ; they glittered and sparkled in their cases, but they were all his gifts, they could not be sold to meet her present need. It was too horribly like the woman without the wedding ring to be driven to such a thing. She put them all away and returned to the letter. In a post-script the writer said he was coming to London soon, to-day in fact. He wanted her to leave Curayl and meet him not later than to-morrow. She would meet him, though not with any idea of following the rest of his suggestion. It was no good going to-day, he would not get to London till late. He would sleep at the *Charing Cross Hotel* ; he told her to meet him there at two to-morrow. She fetched a time table and looked up the trains. The service from Gainsford was not good, and it was a long drive from Curayl to the station ; however, by starting

come to London at all. When she pre-
at the hotel just about the time he ha
in his letter he was rather surprised.

"Oh," he said, "then you have
Glad you have taken my advice, much
away from that place."

Beatrice did not commit herself to
with this. "I want to talk things over
was all she said.

"That's a compliment you don't oft
he observed.

There was some truth in this but she
"Is there nowhere private where we c
few minutes?" she asked.

"I don't think it's worth moving," h
leaning back. "There is no one much
and if there were they wouldn't be in
my advice—it is my advice you want,

Beatrice said "yes" and paused. Go
a pretty woman who passed near the
moment Beatrice spoke again. "It is
Waterside people," she said with an eff

"What about them?" her husband
out taking his eyes from the slowly retre

"Then have you?"



CURAYL

"Jolly bad bit of property too—I say, why don't you wear pink silk petticoats?" The pretty woman had lifted her dress as she went down two shallow steps and shown a flutter of rose-coloured frills. Beatrice, intent on the matter in hand, had not seen her and answered the question which seemed to her apropos of nothing, rather curtly, "Because I don't like them."

"I do," Goyte said. "You'd better order some. Tell them to send the bill in to me."

It was on the tip of Beatrice's tongue to tell him that she considered the choosing of her clothes her own affair, but she thought better of it and only said, "I will order a pink petticoat if you wish it."

He knew she was not pleased by her manner, but he enjoyed her compliance all the more on that account. The pretty stranger had stopped; apparently she was waiting for some one; he continued to watch her and Beatrice returned to the charge.

"As I was saying, the Waterside is my property——"

"And as I was saying," Goyte interrupted, "it is a rotten bit of property too—you know my opinion of all Curayl. If it's advice about that you want, you can have it. You had much better sell every bit of it; it is nothing but a sink for money. But go on, don't let me interrupt you."

But he had interrupted effectually. For a moment the Waterside was forgotten. "Sell Curayl?" she repeated. "The house where we have always lived!"

"You can't go on living there always; in fact you live there practically never now. The house is no good to you, it is just an expensive toy. If things don't look up a bit I shouldn't wonder if we had to put down a few of such luxuries."



CURAYL

He may not have meant what he said quite literally, but she imagined that he did, and her temples throbbed though she answered coldly, "I am sorry that you are worried about business, and if you wish if I will do my best to economize. But as to selling Curayl—it could not be thought of. Of course I should not think of asking you to spend anything you did not feel able to afford—but I could not sell it."

"Did you come up to town to tell me that?" Goyte asked. He was annoyed by the studied repression of her tone. She would no more willingly exhibit her feelings to him than to her groom, and he knew and resented it.

She, on her part, did not know how she had offended, but she felt she had begun wrong. To save further mistakes she came to the point at once. "I want to help the people at the Waterside," she said. "I want very much to help them."

"You want me to," Goyte corrected, "your charity usually takes that form."

Beatrice flushed, but she had come to ask a favour, so she only said, "I am afraid that is what I do want."

"And you have taken the trouble to come and tell me so? Why, you wrote the other day about it. What's the good of dragging up here? I told you my opinion when I answered your letter."

"I know you did, but I thought—I thought perhaps you would reconsider it."

"Why on earth should I?"

He turned to look at her in surprise and nerving herself to go through with it she answered, "Because I want it. I know there is no claim upon you; there is no need for you to do it; only I thought perhaps you would help them to—to please me."



CURAYL

"To please you?" he said. "That's a novel idea, a new method of attack for you. I can't say I am as much moved by it as I ought to be. I don't know that I am altogether in the humour to please you with new drains or a battalion of nurses, or any other expensive patch to your worthless tenants and property."

"I don't want it as a patch to the property," she pleaded. "I want it to help the people. I want you to give it as a present to me, just as you would give me a diamond bracelet. Can't you let me have it instead of a birthday present? I would so much rather have it than jewellery or anything else."

"Would you? That is interesting, but unfortunate, since I prefer to invest my money in jewellery. It is more negotiable; besides, I like to see you trimmed up as much as other women."

"I have plenty of things, more than I want. I would so much rather have this."

"I can believe it, seeing it has to do with Curayl. A stone[from Curayl, a square yard of the slushy ground is more to you than anything else, I know, but it does not happen to be to me."

Beatrice opened her lips, and closed them again; then she made her last appeal. "If you will help me," she said, "afterwards I will give up the Waterside. I will turn all the people out when the fever is over. I will sell the land by the river, or if I can't sell it, I will have the houses pulled down and let it be idle, desolate. I will give it up."

Goyte had no idea what the offer meant to her, though he could see that to make it cost her a great deal, and seeing it, he laughed. He was of the kind that, though not wantonly cruel, likes to have his dogs and women servile, and finds pleasure in making

CURAYL

them jealous, turning them to ridicule and seeing them cringe. Beatrice had never cringed before; she had never come with hesitation asking a favour. If he had meant to grant it he still could not have resisted giving her a thrust first about the valuelessness of her cherished property and the poverty of her final offer. But he did not mean to grant it. At the best he was annoyed at her love for Curayl and the exclusiveness of her feelings, and to-day he had been annoyed more than usual. It must be admitted in his defence, that he did not know what importance she attached to her request, and did not realize that it was to her anything more than the paying of some over-long dressmaker's bill or the purchase of some coveted ornament. So he laughed and advised, "I wouldn't try bribery if I were you, unless I had something better than that to offer. I don't care whether your tenants stay at the Waterside or not; they don't cost me anything and never will."

She rose without speaking, her face set and composed but her eyes blazing.

"Going?" he asked carelessly. "Where are you off to? What's the hurry?"

"There is no reason why I should stay," she answered, "there is nothing more to be said. You have made it plain that nothing is to be done for the people."

"That I shall do nothing," he corrected. "You of course can do as you please. I can't presume to interfere with the actions of so great a person as the Lady of Curayl."

"Thank you," she said and turned away.

He rose cheerfully, well pleased with the irony of his last remark. He knew she was not in a position to do anything with his permission or without it.



CURAYL

"Are you off?" he said. "When shall I see you again?"

"Not for some time, I expect," she said.

"Is that so? Well, good-bye, then. Don't forget about the pink petticoats."

"I am afraid I shall not be able to order them," she said, glancing up at the clock. "I have only just time for my train. I am going back to Curayl."

He followed her into the hall, and she said a polite good-bye as she stepped into a waiting cab.

"She's going to sulk, I suppose," he thought as he watched her drive away. "Well, she's welcome, if she likes. I don't mind. I'd just as soon she did stop at Curayl till she feels better." But as he turned away he exclaimed, "Damn it! Why doesn't she explode when she's angry, instead of bottling it up and speaking as if I were a draper's assistant and not worth quarrelling with!"

But he was wrong in his estimate of Beatrice. She was not going to Curayl to sulk, that was not her nature. She was angry, it is true, far more angry than he had any idea of; so angry that she dared not trust herself to think of what had passed. She resolutely shut her mind to it, even though Goyte's laugh still rang in her ears, and her own humiliation kept the blood tingling in her veins. She determinedly turned her thoughts from what had passed to what was to be done. All through the tedious journey she pondered as to what she could do; with the result that by the time she reached home she had her plan matured.

She at once set to work to put it into execution. It was not difficult; things tended to help her; the servants were quite ready to fall in with her suggestion. They were decidedly nervous about the fever at the Waterside; it was nearer than they liked, so



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they were pleased when it was known that their mistress was going to shut up the house and they were all to go home as soon as possible. Having arranged this, Beatrice installed an old gardener and his wife at Curayl and made her own preparations. She packed a few clothes and collected together all the little money she could, shut up the greater part of the house, and set out for the Waterside.

She drove to the outskirts of the settlement. There she got down. The old gardener who had accompanied her, handed out her bag, turned the horse's head and drove back to Curayl. When he had gone she pushed the bag into a clump of furze bushes, and leaving it hidden started along the sunny road alone. Goyte had said she was at liberty to do what she pleased for the stricken people, and, since she had nothing else to give, she had determined to give her services.



CHAPTER VI

TYPHUS was fairly at the Waterside, but it did not spread beyond ; it was practically confined to the little settlement by the river. This was partly owing to the isolated position of the place, and partly to the lack of outside interference, but more to Luttrell. At least so Dr. Tollinger said, and he saw the whole thing through, and should have been in a position to judge, and judge fairly, seeing that he was not unduly biassed in Luttrell's favour. The doctor was not inclined to belittle one who shared that time with him, but he never agreed with the "heroic self-sacrifice" view of Luttrell's conduct. "At the first hint of need," so the doctor said, "he was up at the Waterside like a shot, and in less time than it takes most men to turn round he had established a paternal despotism. He loved the job ; it wasn't a sacrifice ; he loved it, I tell you, and the people loved him—that was the secret of the business. He had a way with him, and in no time every rascal in the place was ready to swear by him and for him and at any one who opposed him."

This may have been the explanation ; at all events, whatever the reason, when Beatrice came to the Waterside, Luttrell was practically, though not nominally, the man in command. She, of course, knew nothing of his presence there ; she

CURAYL

had only heard vaguely of Tollinger's work. It was to him that she went on her first coming. She imagined that if she was to help the people it must be more or less in connection with the doctor ; and so, though she had not given him previous notice of her intention, she found him out on her arrival and introduced herself to him.

Tollinger did not receive her offered help with enthusiasm ; he had theories about women being kept in their place, and the Waterside at the present time he did not consider the place for any untrained woman. He explained as much to Beatrice with considerable plainness. Not that that disturbed her. To his intense annoyance she did not seem to trouble about his want of welcome, or even to think his opinion very important. Worst of all, far from being impressed by his peremptory advice to go back at once, she showed every sign of staying in spite of him and every sound and reasonable argument.

At last in wrath he left her, and set out to find Luttrell.

"Didn't I tell you sooner or later I should be reminded that you were a priest ? " he fumed.

"What is the matter ? " Luttrell asked.

"As sure as there is a parson in anything," the doctor retorted, "so sure are the women to come in."

Luttrell laughed. "The women won't come after me," he said, "if for no other reason than they don't know anything about me. I told you I was a total stranger in the place, and, as you know, I have been very careful to keep out of the public eye. I don't suppose there are three people in Gainsford who know I am here, or who would want to see me if they did."

"Anyhow, there's a woman turned up."



CURAYL

"What has she come for?"

"She thinks she is going to do a little fancy work, sick nursing and good deeds in general down here."

"Have you been undeceiving her?"

"Yes, I have. I told her the plain state of the case. I didn't spare some of the details either."

"And what did she say?"

"Nothing; looked over the top of my head."

Luttrell seemed amused, but Tollinger did not consider it in the least amusing.

"Anyway, I'm not going to have a pack of fine ladies down here," he said shortly, "you had better come and see her and tell her so. I can't make any impression; perhaps you can."

Luttrell said he would try what he could do, and Tollinger went back to explain his opinions to the offender all over again; when Luttrell arrived he was still doing it. He wore a suit of brown check, or rather checks, for each garment was of a different stuff. That of the coat was remarkable; as a railway rug it would have been something of a success, as a coat for a short broad man it was a mistake. His chin was a little in need of shaving and his moustache was decidedly ragged—it seemed to bristle as he talked to the offending fine lady. She, when Luttrell entered, was seated nearly back to the door, listening with a polite indifference that plainly annoyed. She was young and fair and dignified; in more than looks she was all the doctor was not, and Luttrell felt a disloyal inclination to laugh, when he saw how unevenly they were matched.

Tollinger jumped up as he came in. "Here you are," he said, with something like relief, and he formally presented him.

Beatrice bowed, and as she did so her eyes met Luttrell's. For a moment her eyelids flickered; not

CURAYL

a recognition, just a quiver, then the look was gone and her face was a haughty blank. Luttrell bowed too, but his eyelids did not quiver, he had the air of an absolute stranger.

"Dr. Tollinger tells me you have come to help the Waterside people," he said. "It is very good of you; they certainly want help."

"Yes, but it isn't help a lady can give," Tollinger interrupted. "You can't stop here, it's out of the question."

Beatrice showed a little surprise. "I fear," she said, "I do not quite understand the position. These people are my tenants, and the land my land; you must pardon me if I fail to see my need of permission to go or stay."

"Naturally," Luttrell answered her. He was rather amused, though he concealed it. "We have not the slightest right to say go or stay to any one, we can merely advise. You are no doubt aware that there is a great danger of infection."

She was, and she said so impatiently, and Luttrell went on—"Apart from any danger to yourself, there is also the risk of carrying the disease. If you come here, you would, for the sake of others, have to stay, or at least stay a good while on neutral ground before you went away again."

"Of course."

Tollinger showed signs of irritation. These were poor arguments, he considered, and those that followed no better.

"You understand," Luttrell said, "that the work here is not of an easy or pleasant kind; also that Dr. Tollinger is in a measure in command, and if you nurse his patients you must look to him for orders."

Beatrice did not even glance in the direction of the doctor as she again answered, "Of course."



CURAYL

"Under those circumstances," Luttrell said, "if, realizing all these things, you still wish to stay and help, we have neither the power nor the will to refuse you. Indeed we, like every one else at the Waterside, shall be grateful to have your help."

The doctor turned away with a snort. It was evident there was one person, at least, who was not at all grateful. But Luttrell paid no attention. "Tollinger," he said, "Mrs. Curayl might have a room in your cottage by the marsh, don't you think? It is within a reasonable distance of the Waterside," he explained to Beatrice, "and has the double advantage of being quiet and looked after by an old woman who is not afraid of the fever, at that distance, and who can cook a little. I think you would be more comfortable if you made your headquarters there and only spent your days here."

"Thank you," Beatrice answered. "I should prefer to stay here altogether—it would no doubt suit Dr. Tollinger better."

"Pray go to the cottage as far as I am concerned," the doctor said hastily. "I'd be pleased for you to do so. I'm hardly ever there myself."

Before she could refuse this ingenuous invitation Luttrell said, "If you would rather stay here I dare say something could be managed, I don't quite know what. There is an empty room in the cottage where I am, but unfortunately no old woman, so the cooking is more than promiscuous."

Beatrice decided to accept the doctor's hospitality, which was perhaps as well, since at present Luttrell's empty room was rather hypothetical. These arrangements being satisfactorily made, it was suggested that she should begin work at once by going to the Heward children. They had not got fever, but they had nothing to eat, and no one to do anything

CURAYL

for them. Their father had been taken away ill days ago, and now, this morning, the neighbour who cared for them had followed him. Beatrice undertook the charge for the present, and Luttrell went to the door with her to point out the house, while Tollinger behind gave vent to his feelings.

Luttrell turned round when Beatrice had gone. "Go on," he said sympathetically, as the doctor paused, "you'll feel better afterwards."

"I shan't," Tollinger retorted, "not until I can knock a little sense into your head, and that'll be never. You curates are all alike where a woman's concerned! A good-looking woman comes along, no matter where, and of course you don't send her about her business!"

"Do you think I could have sent that one?" Luttrell asked. "She is not a drivable kind, and she has considerably more right to be here than we have."

"I know that; still, you could have sent her off if you chose."

"Perhaps I could," Luttrell admitted. He wondered if he could. If he had made, as she had, that movement that was not quite a recognition, would she have gone? She might perhaps have been convinced that it was not fitting for her to come to the Waterside, where there was typhus—and the man who preached at Curayl. But he did not mention this to the doctor, he only allowed that perhaps he might have succeeded.

"Then why the devil didn't you try?" Tollinger demanded.

"Don't know—at least, I suppose I do—I had a ridiculous and impertinent notion that it might be good for her to stay."

"Good for you, you mean. I tell you what it is,



CURAYL

I won't have her nursing my patients. If you can give her odd jobs of minding people's children, well and good ; if you can't, you must find her something else. I won't have anything to do with her."

Luttrell laughed. " You will have to go down to the marsh cottage to-night," he said, " and play host."

" I'll be hanged if I do," Tollinger retorted ; then, as an afterthought, he added : " She would not like it if I did, she would want a chaperone."

" Chaperones are not much in her line," Luttrell told him. " She is Curayl of Curayl, and so a law unto herself."

" Then it's a pity she don't go back to Curayl," the doctor grunted.

In the meantime Beatrice went down the street. She had not a very clear idea what she was to do, but she did not want to stay and ask questions. It was useless to ask them of the doctor, and the other—was he not the man who had preached at Curayl ? She was conscious that she was unreasonably angry to find him here ; it seemed so unnecessary as well as so unexpected that he should cross her path again. Of course, he had not recognized her, she was sure of it ; he had never seen her in a good light as she had him ; but for all that, she owned it to herself, she had shrunk from the idea of remaining where daily, hourly almost, she might come in contact with him. The feeling was only momentary ; she had mastered it now ; she had come to help the people at the Waterside, and she was going to stay and do it in spite of everything. With her mind quite made up on that point she went down the road to the Hewards' cottage.

That afternoon proved rather trying to Beatrice.

cottage in order. It took her a long time, but everything was so strange to her. Making a bed and a patchwork quilt, and putting a baby to sleep was as new as either. It was not long she had finished; indeed, she had just finished when Luttrell came. She was not expecting him, but she was not altogether displeased at carrying a baby in his arms, and it seemed very comfortable there. The other children, too, seemed to be on excellent terms with him. Joey, the eldest, rushed out and said, "Hulloh, mister, I ain't goin' to be no more."

"No, my son, not till next time," he answered him.

"Not the nex' time, nor never," he declared, thumping him familiarly, and the girl who had followed Joey looked on with interest at the baby.

"Whose baby's that?" she asked.

"Mrs. Tompkins'."

The child looked more inquisitive, and she demanded, "Did they take her away?"

Luttrell nodded, and Beatrice asked, "Will she be of the child?"

CURAYL

"In the meantime Lottie is going to mind it for me; aren't you, Lottie?"

The little girl nodded vigorously, and sitting down on a stool held out her arms. Luttrell put the baby into them. It was safe for her to hold it while she sat down, though she looked too small to carry it across the room. Beatrice watched her. "You do not surely intend to leave these children here alone to-night?" she asked.

Luttrell said he did not.

"Who is coming? The neighbours seem afraid."

"I am," he told her.

"You?" She looked at the baby. "You can't; besides there is nowhere to sleep. I have made up some sort of a bed that will do for the little girls, but the place is absolutely bare."

"Tollinger is good at disinfecting," he admitted, "but I've no doubt we shall do grandly for to-night. To-morrow I hope to persuade some woman to take charge."

Beatrice began to unpin her hat. "Until you do I shall remain here," she said decisively. Luttrell did not deny her right to do as she pleased. "It is very good of you," he said; then he suggested an amendment. "How would it be if you took the family down to Tollinger's cottage? They would be better off there, and you would find it more comfortable. You know you were to have been put up there."

"Thank you," she answered, "I shall do quite well here. Dr. Tollinger might reasonably object to having the children there."

"Not he. I'll put his valuables out of the way. I think you would find it better there; there is more room, also beds, baths, and cooked food."

She did not look as if she approved of going, and



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Luttrell, seeing it, went on : " Of course, the house is lonely, a good way from everywhere. If you don't care for being there——"

This counter argument had effect, and Beatrice came to the conclusion that it was better the children should be moved from their present surroundings. She put on her hat again while Luttrell found the children's. After that they collected what clothing they could. It was impossible to do this without a few necessary remarks and questions as to what each had found and what must be taken, which had a sound of intimacy somewhat at variance with her determination to keep the preacher at arm's length. When they had found all they could they tied the things into bundles and set out together with the children.

Tollinger saw them go by. Joey walked in front carrying a basket and a stick, the two little girls followed, leading the youngest but one between them, Beatrice and Luttrell brought up the rear, she carrying the baby, and he the youngest Heward and a big bundle tied up in the patchwork quilt. So they went down the road in the sunset, for all the world like a family of tramps on the move, Tollinger thought, but he kept the opinion to himself. The resemblance may also have occurred to Luttrell, but it certainly did not to Beatrice. She was fortunately too intent on the business in hand.

Thus, to the doctor's satisfaction, was Beatrice disposed of for a time. She had plenty to do at the marsh cottage, for the old woman now declined to come any more. Beatrice would have been left alone with the children if Luttrell had not sent Jenny to her first thing in the morning. Jenny was an orphan who bore her bereavement very philosophically ; in fact, she did not appear to regret her father's recent



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death from fever at all except that the exigencies of the case allowed no chance of an effective funeral. She and her little brother, Tom, were sent down to the marsh cottage the day after Beatrice was installed there with the Hewards. Tom fought all day with Joey, which was agreeable to both ; but Jenny flew upon the work in a way that was beautiful to see. Beatrice she regarded with a sort of breathless admiration, at first speechless, but afterwards expressing itself in a few words. "A real lady," was what the girl called her, and interpreted the rather vague term to mean a wonderful, unapproachable person who could not be permitted to do any menial work ; that is, if it were possible to prevent it. She did her best to prevent it and did not forget to treat the children severely if she thought them lacking in respect. Her coming to the cottage made a considerable difference to Beatrice.

But Tollinger's self-congratulations proved to be a little premature. The admirable arrangement at the marsh cottage had not been working many days before he was called upon to face another difficulty, in the shape of another volunteer. This time he did not call in Luttrell, but disposed of the lady himself, not even mentioning her coming to Luttrell till the evening ; then, believing her to be well placed some hours ago, he told him casually—

"Another woman has turned up."

"Has she come after you or me?" Luttrell inquired.

"Neither. She doesn't know you are here, and doesn't care if I am. She's got 'good works' too. It is evidently an epidemic disease."

Luttrell laughed. "What have you done with her?" he asked. "Shut her up to be talked to?"

"No; I'm not going to be made a fool of the second

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time. She's a pretty girl; not to be compared with the other perhaps, though more soft and womanly. It's no good my saying she's to go if you only come along and say she can stay. I've taken her down to the cottage. I thought she and Mrs. Curayl could manage that between them and let Jenny come up here. I can find her plenty to do."

"Oh, yes," Luttrell said with twinkling eyes. "I suppose they are all delighted?"

"Delighted?" the doctor snapped. "What's that to do with it? They came here to help, I thought, not to please themselves."

"Are they not pleased?"

"Mrs. Curayl seemed pleased," Tollinger said doubtfully. "I don't know if she really was; the other wasn't, there was a sort of feeling of icicles and broken bottle glass about. As for Jenny, she's an impudent little hussy. I took her outside and gave her a piece of my mind."

"And in return, I dare say, got a piece of hers," Luttrell suggested. "There's no doubt about it, Tollinger, there's a diplomatist lost in you."

"Diplomacy be hanged. I left them to stew in their own juice till the morning. They'll settle down."

"They will settle who is to go. Possibly they will do that this evening. By the way, what is the name of the new-comer? I hope she has not far to go home."

The doctor seemed a little annoyed that Luttrell should be so sure she would go, but he only said, "Ranger—Miss Ranger."

"Helen Ranger?" Luttrell exclaimed. "You don't mean Helen Ranger?"

"She said that was her name," Tollinger retorted, "though how did you come to know it? I thought you were a total stranger. It is rather an odd coinci-



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dence that you should know something of both these two volunteers."

Luttrell did not answer. "She must go back," was all he said. "She must go back at once."

"Why?"

"She is an only daughter. It would break her father's heart if anything were to happen to her. Besides, her whole life and surroundings have made her totally unfit——"

The earnestness of Luttrell's manner surprised the doctor. He looked up inquisitively, observing: "I should have thought all that applied equally to the other; she is a lot the bigger swell of the two, so her training should have made her more unfit. She is a young wife and, according to you, the last of an old family, and so likely to be wanted alive by some people."

"The cases are totally different," Luttrell said. "Helen Ranger must go. I shall tell her it is her duty to go back to her father at once!" And he started towards the door.

Tollinger shrugged his shoulders. "As a parson, I suppose you are an authority on duty," he said; "but, speaking as an ordinary man, I should not care for the responsibility of deciding what other people ought to do."

Luttrell stopped. "I don't like it either," he said ruefully; "but I don't see how it is to be helped now. I began the thing without seeing the end. I will have to go on a bit further before I get out of it."

The doctor, not possessing all the details, did not quite understand. "Of course, I don't know what you have been doing," he said; "but I never yet met a muddle that was made better by getting further in it. Your experience may be different."

you had anything to do with it coming here? I don't believe it.

"I wish I didn't. I wouldn't have done it if I didn't think I had."

"It is nonsense," the doctor said. "Come on a fancy. They are just a couple of young women. They would have done it for any one or no one. I don't see what to do with the matter."

But Luttrell thought differently. "She came here because of what I said," he said, "rather, what she understood me to say. The reason she shall go back again as I shall send her. I believe I can cut the thread of her madness once for all. As for Mrs. Curran, she did not come for what I said, but I let her go through what I did not say. I'll tell you she will go now, which is doubtful. I'll go to the cottage. You must occupy one of the other. I can't do with both at once."

Tollinger rose. "All right," he said. "I'll come. I rather want to see Lott. I don't altogether like the look of her. I'm looking for something—oh, no, not for anything."



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but they were out of the way in the kitchen, so that, when Tollinger had gone upstairs with Beatrice, Luttrell had the little front room and Helen to himself. Helen, it was, sure enough ; there from a sense of duty only, somewhat nervous of the work at the Waterside, very nervous of this easier work which she was well qualified to do, but had to share with the unapproachable Lady of Curayl ; but for all that determined to go through with it. The doctor had snubbed her when she had first presented herself, mildly for him, but it was a good deal to her. Mrs. Curayl had welcomed her, but with a politeness which seemed to the self-conscious girl to outline a gulf between them. The sight of Luttrell as he came in that evening was a positive comfort to her. Though she had only met him once before, he seemed like a friend among strangers, besides, so she thought, he, at least, would encourage her to go on with the dreaded work.

But he did no such thing. He was sorry to hurt her, he hated to hurt anything, and frequently failed in rectitude from that branch of cowardice, but on this occasion he did not spare. Helen had to go ; it did not much matter how, but go she must. Against his will he found he was placed in the position of spiritual director. He did not like it but, finding himself there, he did not scruple to use the weapons that it put in his hand, and in a little she professed herself ready to do as he advised, so humbly and meekly that his heart smote him. It is just possible he would have undone part of his own work in trying to reinstate her in her good opinion, if Tollinger had not opened the door at an opportune minute.

"Going back ?" he asked. He had caught some words of Helen's or pretended he had. "A good

trice if he chose, and dismiss possible. But he did not that Tollinger, at least, was stood by the open door, was seeming in no hurry to begin time, feeling neither proud had done, nor at all desirous second half of his task. Then Beatrice came into the room.

"Has Dr. Tollinger gone?"

"Yes," Luttrell answered. "You want him?"

"Lottie is worse, I am afraid all the time he was here. Still he could see her. He has I suppose?" Beatrice was worried. "Will you come?"

"Perhaps you could tell me."

"I can tell you if it is or isn't," said. "My knowledge and experience much farther." Nevertheless he went upstairs to the room where he had spent the night of his first coming. He was a woman's occupation about it.



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"Well, Lottie," he said, "this is a come-down. I thought you were going to look after the baby, and now it seems you have got to be looked after yourself."

The child laughed. She did not seem to be fully herself, but she evidently understood him. "My 'ead ached," she said, "so I went to bed. I'm better now. I'm goin' to git up."

"It's too late," Luttrell told her, "you had better wait till to-morrow."

"It is to-morrow," she returned. "The sun's got up three times since I've been here. I don't like this bed, there's a ole man close by in the corner there. He keeps grinnin' at me."

She pointed to where a dress hung. Beatrice moved it. "See, there is nothing there," she said. But the child only repeated fretfully: "Don't like this bed."

Beatrice looked across at Luttrell and her eyes asked a question. He shook his head. "Not that," he said, "though I don't know what."

"Dr. Tollinger could not say when he was here," she said, in a low voice, "he is coming again in the morning. I wish he were here now."

Luttrell began to take the counterpane off the bed. "Supposing we wrap you up in this," he suggested to Lottie, "and you come and sit on my knee while the bed has a rest."

The child welcomed the idea and Luttrell wrapped her up. "We will sit up and have a talk," he said. "It is no good stopping in bed when you're not sleepy, is it? She will be all right with me for a bit," he went on, turning to Beatrice. "I will keep her out of bed for half an hour or so; after that I dare say she will settle down for the night."

Beatrice thought it quite possible, and anyhow was



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glad of an opportunity of going to look after the other children. So she went, leaving Lottie quite happy with Luttrell. It was somehow rather difficult, she found, to keep on remembering that he was the man who had preached at Curayl. She could have wished either that he was more unpleasant now, or less unpleasant then, for his words had been unforgivable, and yet, in a time or situation of difficulty, he certainly had advantages. One could not wish him away.

When Beatrice had seen the rest of the children to bed and set things in order downstairs, she came up again. Lottie was by this time asleep in Luttrell's arms, but so lightly and uneasily that it was impossible to move her.

"I had better stay a bit and hold her," he said. "Won't you go and get some rest?"

But she declined. "I would rather be here," she said. "The children are my charge and I would sooner remain." And she sat down to share the watch.

Here was the opportunity for Luttrell. He could not speak above a whisper for fear of waking the child, but he could speak and Beatrice must listen. He determined to try what he could do to make her go. Something warned him that to merely recognize her as the woman who spoke to him in the churchyard would not be enough now, it was too late for that. He must first exhibit himself as an inquisitive, ill-bred person likely to presume upon such an accident. He at once proceeded to do this, in whispers, across the sleeping child. Or rather, he tried to, not with entire success as far as carrying conviction to his hearer was concerned. Circumstances and the situation were against him; they rather conspired to make him look better, not worse than he was. Beatrice's instinct had summed



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him up as a gentleman and one to be trusted, in spite of the fact that he was the preacher. It was not likely that she would be quick to accept indirect evidence against it, being a woman and a Curayl, and so really convinced of her right to decide. Hence it was that Luttrell did not succeed as he had expected, though he fetched a very wide compass to do it. So wide indeed, that the talk came to include a good many things not in his original programme, by which means he possibly helped to defeat his own ends. At all events he had not sufficiently established his position to venture on a recognition when Lottie awoke.

The child was obviously worse and Beatrice was very uneasy about her.

"I shall fetch Dr. Tollinger," she said. "You say he has gone to Gainsford? I will meet him on his way back."

"I am afraid you will miss him," Luttrell said. "He is going back to the Waterside, you know; I don't know which way he will take. Let us send Jenny up there for him—Jenny to do the business and Tom as escort. They can leave a message for him to come here as soon as he gets back."

Beatrice demurred, but there seemed nothing else to be done. She did not want Luttrell to go. Lottie cried directly he tried to put her out of his arms; and she herself, she was nearly sure, could not find her way to the village in the dark. So she went to rouse the brother and sister and to start them on their errand.

When she came back Lottie had developed a fancy for Luttrell to sing to her. He tried to put her off, but she was very fretful, and would not listen when he told her he was afraid it would wake the others.

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As she still kept on fretting, Beatrice said : " Will you not humour her ? I don't think it would wake the others, they sleep very soundly."

Luttrell hesitated, and Lottie repeated her demand. It seemed to Beatrice that she was asking for some particular song which he had sung before. She did not know what it was, but he guessed and still hesitated, a nervousness that was wholly absurd making him anxious not to sing it with his present audience.

Perhaps Beatrice felt his embarrassment, for she went to the window, and lifting the curtain stood as if looking for the doctor. Luttrell, while her back was turned, sang for the sick child the three verses which Tollinger had heard that sunny first morning. Beatrice listened ; she had meant not to, or at least to appear not, but the haunting, rippling music took possession of her ; she could not choose but listen. Gradually the hand that held the curtain relaxed its hold, and she stood listening, listening, straining to catch the half-felt meaning that the thing held for her. Was it a memory from some simpler, happier past, or a breath from another life that it brought, this strange little song about the peasant Christ, who wept and laughed and loved not only man, but the dear green world and the trivial daily life ? The voice ceased ; the child, satisfied, drowsed again ; but Beatrice had forgotten the child, she turned from the window to the singer.

" Thank you," she said softly, and though she did not know it, her face was still and sad and her eyes full of longing. He saw it, and saw that she was moved beyond her wont, so he said nothing. What could he say ? How break in on the emotions caused, perhaps, by some recall of other happier days,



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to tell her that he knew the whole story of her sordid marriage and to intrude himself upon it? So he said nothing, and for a little they sat in silence. Afterwards they spoke of other things.

In this way it came about that Luttrell's resolution to tell the truth—or rather more—came to nothing. When the doctor arrived Beatrice was still in ignorance—and possession of the situation, with no idea or intention of abandoning it.

CHAPTER VII

DURING the epidemic at the Waterside one question was raised about which there was afterwards a good deal of talk ; it was on the subject of burials. Tollinger was in favour of burial on the spot without any reference to consecrated or unconsecrated ground ; Luttrell was opposed to it. The doctor argued and expostulated, assuring Luttrell that he might pacify the ecclesiastical conscience by any forms and ceremonies he thought fit, and by reading the burial service with all the rites he deemed necessary. But Luttrell was not troubled by the ecclesiastical conscience ; only by a few awkward scruples which, instead of being pacified by the offer, stood in the way of his pushing the part he had assumed to this extreme. Accordingly he remained obdurate, and while he stood firm the thing was impossible, for the Waterside to a man was his. Yet in the end he gave way, and went to considerably greater lengths than Tollinger had dared to suggest ; for, as he told Beatrice, the thing might as well be done thoroughly if it was to be done at all.

Beatrice at that time shared the cottage Luttrell occupied at the Waterside. She had moved up there the very morning after Luttrell's unfruitful resolution to send her back to Curayl. She had come in the wake of Lottie, who was certainly very ill, too ill to remain among the other children. Tollinger at



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first would not pronounce judgment on the case, except to say that it was not typhus, and so could not be taken to the extemporized fever hospital. Afterwards he diagnosed it as a variation of the low fever indigenous to the marshy place, but a bad variation and one demanding much attention. Lottie was taken to Luttrell's cottage because there was room there, and because it was on the outskirts of the settlement. Beatrice was installed as her nurse because she needed one all to herself, and because it was easy to find a widow to look after the children at the marsh cottage, but not at all easy in the present state of things to find any one able and willing to nurse Lottie, although her complaint was not infectious.

The idea of setting Mrs. Curayl—who would not go home as ordered, to nurse the child seemed excellent to Tollinger. The arrangement was entirely of his making, and the fact that Luttrell was bound to share the cottage with her, because there was nowhere else for him to go, did not trouble the doctor in the least. The fact that Jenny insisted on joining herself to the establishment did, he said it was nonsense, and there was not the least occasion for her to be there. For which opinion Jenny cared nothing at all, but followed her admired lady to the cottage, where she took upon herself a sort of mixed office of attendant on Beatrice, cook, purveyor and general servant, and enjoyed it immensely.

As for Beatrice, she accepted the situation without protest. If she was to nurse Lottie—and she certainly was the most suitable person—she must be in the same house with her; and there really was no other house for them or Luttrell. Being a Curayl she had no prudish scruples; while with regard to

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her personal dislike of meeting so constantly the man who had preached—she somehow came to forget the preaching in the man or even to forgive the preacher for the sake of the man. Circumstances somewhat contrived to invest him with an unfair and undeserved interest just then, afterwards she recognized that. He was the hero of the Waterside; she was not given to hero-worship, and she met him in daily life, but she came to understand and possibly to share a little of the people's sentiment. Also he was the man in command; partly by right of his ability to organize, but more by reason of his capacity to handle men sympathetically, he was master of the situation, and as such appealed to her. There were other points on which he appealed—his good-fellowship, his tact, and his knowledge when to keep silent. This last especially was a characteristic to be appreciated, for in time she began to fancy that he knew it was she who had spoken to him in the churchyard at Curayl, and knowing still made no sign of recognition. She was grateful to him for this silence; by degrees she even ceased to regret the occurrence. After all it did not greatly matter if he did have that glimpse of her inner life, seeing that he said nothing; eventually it even grew to be something of a comfort to think some one knew and perhaps understood, at least that this some one did.

So it came about that these two shared the intimacies of a cottage menage and to a certain extent shared the care of a sick child. Lottie always cried for Luttrell to come to her when she heard his voice or step. They met constantly, and neither found it irksome; and they discussed many Waterside affairs together, the burial question among them. Beatrice knew a little about the argument there had been,



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though Luttrell had scarcely mentioned the subject to her ; indeed he never directly referred to it till the day when he told her he had given way.

" You are going to do as the doctor wishes ? " she asked in some surprise. Jenny's gossip—Jenny did gossip in spite of her respectful admiration—had led her to believe he was very decided in his opposition.

He nodded. " I have thrown over the scruples," he said. " I am going to greater lengths even than Tollinger suggested."

" What are you going to do ? " she inquired.

" Burn the bodies. It is the only sensible sanitary thing in the circumstances. One may as well do the thing thoroughly, and I have quite as much right and power to consecrate a fire as a few square yards of marshy ground."

" Do you approve of it ? " she asked with her unswerving directness.

He shrugged his shoulders. " I do not think that the poor fellows will go quicker to Tophet because their bodies are burned than because they are left to befoul the good clean earth. My reason, if you want to know, for objecting to the whole business is that I don't like my own part in it. I have played fairly low before now, but I would rather have kept out of this. It was not the good of the people, or law, or appearances I was considering in standing out against Tollinger's idea, it was my own self-respect and things of that sort. There you have the whole truth."

She looked as if she rather liked it. " I should not call it a scruple that you have thrown over," she said, " it is self."

" That is a nice way of putting it," Luttrell answered, " though scarcely correct."

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But in spite of what he said Beatrice was a little puzzled by his attitude and actions.

"I cannot quite understand you," she began after a pause.

"I hope not," he interrupted.

"Why?"

"Because, though you might find it instructive, it certainly would not be edifying."

She laughed, and as the thought occurred to her asked—

"What will the people say to having the bodies burned? They will never allow it."

"Oh yes, they will; some of them are persuaded already. They have been helping to build a furnace on approved principles."

"Already? Is it to be soon then?"

"To-night, in a short time from now in fact. There are four bodies to be disposed of. We are going to burn them all together."

"Are you sure no one will interfere?" Beatrice asked. She remembered scraps of Jenny's gossip and felt doubtful of public opinion. "You may have been able to make a few see that it is wiser, but I am afraid you will never convert them all. How are you going to do it?"

"Talk to them. It is no more difficult to persuade them to one thing than to another. Quite as easy to persuade them to a fire as to burial in unconsecrated ground—as easy and as tiring."

There came to Beatrice's mind the thought of the sermon at Curayl, when he had persuaded her to strange things. And with the thought came that other absurd onewhich had intruded itself upon her as trifles will, the ridiculous fancy of the preacher's resemblance to the magic piper of Hamelin.

She looked up suddenly and their eyes met, and

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something prompted Luttrell to refer to the sermon which before they had so carefully avoided. "I know what you are thinking of," he said; "you are wondering if I was trying to persuade some one to something when I preached at Curayl."

"No," she answered, forgetting to resent the reference—after, all when a subject lies at the top of two people's minds for days together it is not very surprising that its edge should show sometimes—"I was thinking that you remind me of some picture I must have seen as a child of the Pied Piper of Hamelin."

"In face, dress, or achievements?" he asked.

"In face."

"That is not flattering. If you said achievements, now, it would have been better. You don't think I can charm the rats away?"

"No," she said smiling. Then gradually the smile died away and her face grew grave and her eyes dark. She looked out of the window as if seeing something far off. "Rats are foul noisome things," she said, more to herself than to him. "Creatures of darkness and decay, they come of rottenness and falsity; they undermine, and undermine what seems good and strong enough. It were better that they were called out to the light and made to show themselves." She turned abruptly to him. "Yes," she said, "I think you can pipe the rats from their hiding-places. I think you have done it."

She turned from him again as quickly as she had looked round, and for a moment there was silence. At last he spoke. "The other piper demanded a long price," he said, "and was not paid. Shall I be paid when I come to demand?"

But before she had time to answer Jenny called from the room where Lottie lay.



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Beatrice rose at once. "Will you come up?" she said.

Luttrell accompanied her, but when he had seen the child he could do no more than agree with her that she was very ill. Soon after he went out. He had a few more arrangements to make before the fire that had been built at his direction was lighted at sundown.

Beatrice was not present at this first cremation at the Waterside. She could not have left Lottie, even if no other reason had prevented. But Jenny went. She pleaded so hard that Beatrice had not the heart to refuse her the unique excitement which she expected to combine the charms of a quadruple funeral with those of a house on fire. Probably she ought not to have gone. Beatrice thought so after she had started, but there was no getting her back then, and certainly she enjoyed it thoroughly; though whether the event came up to her anticipations is not clear. Anyhow she was much impressed, and came back very full of it.

"Oh, mum," was her greeting on her return, "I do wish you'd been there! I never did hear nothink like Mr. Luttrell. He do talk a treat."

"Hush," Beatrice answered, with a glance towards the bed where Lottie lay.

Jenny looked in the same direction. "I'll go outside, mum," she suggested; "then I can tell you about it. If you sit near the door you can hear without me disturbin' her."

It was perhaps undignified, but Mrs. Curayl at the Waterside had come to be a far less stately person than Lady Goyte-Curayl in town. And certainly the arrangement was wise, for Jenny was so full of the evening's affair that she must talk of it



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somehow. Beatrice sat near the door and Jenny went outside and did not close it after her.

"They've made the place right out almost on the marsh," Jenny said, in a shrill whisper from the stair-head. "A funny kind a place it is, but it makes a lovely fire; it draws beautiful. They'd brought the bodies out there when I got there, and put 'em ready to be burned; but afore they sets the fire goin' Mr. Luttrell steps out in front of all the people—there was no end there—and speaks to 'em. The doctor was there quite close up to me. He didn't want all them people to come; he said it'd spread fever; but Mr. Luttrell would have 'em, and he spoke to 'em, askin' 'em if he might burn them as had died. He said he wouldn't do it if any one didn't like it or had objections, if a single one had 'em. Some of 'em didn't half like it at first, but they was fat-heads, and pretty soon when Mr. Luttrell began to talk, they saw it. How a party can go and be buried I can't think! I know I ain't never goin' to be. It's nasty even if there weren't no worms."

Luttrell had made one convert at least; not that Jenny was conscious of the fact, she was too full of her subject to give more than a passing word to opinions.

"I can't tell you what he said, mum," she went on, "but it was just beautiful and that sensible too. He's got a lovely way a sayin' things; it reg'lar makes yer back tickle to listen to him. Not shoutin' and sharp, but so gentle and kind. Once he seemed so sad and sorry, a'most as if he'd done us a wrong instead o' more good'n any one else ever thought of. I believe that Tollinger's at the bottom of it. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he'd been abusin' him for sayin' the folks ought to be burned. I know he

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didn't like Mr. Luttrell talkin' to us, he sort a snorted to himself, I heard him, and once he mutters scornful,—‘A fine theatrical display!’ and another time, ‘The fellow wants limelight.’ But after a bit he got quiet, I will say that, and watched Mr. Luttrell just as he ought to. Right near the end he made a bit of a fuss again—he blew his nose very hard twice and fetched his eye-glasses off, but he didn't say nothink at all.”

“And were the bodies burned?” Beatrice asked.

“O' course,” Jenny answered; “the fellers there would a burnt anythink for Mr. Luttrell—and so they ought! It'll take some while afore they're burnt right up. John Ryatt's goin' to see to keepin' the fire goin'. He's got the job. There's a plenty that'd liked it, but he's got it. But Mr. Luttrell started the fire while we was all lookin' on. And after it had burnt up and been goin' a bit—my, there was a smoke! But it blew right away. When it'd got properly goin' Mr. Luttrell said a bit or two out of the Bible, and then he begun ‘Our Father,’ you know, and we all says it with him very slow, and the doctor, he says it too, I heard him. Then Mr. Luttrell stands lookin' at the fire white and tired and very quiet. Then suddenly he says very solemn, ‘May what is wrong be pardoned, what is right blessed, and some power that is greater than we are take the will for the deed and forgive us all.’ I dunno 'zactly what he meant, but it made you feel kind of queer to hear him. Everybody went away very quiet d'rectly after. I waited a bit to see if anything else was goin' to happen, and the doctor waited too. He didn't see me. When Mr. Luttrell came away he went after him and they walked off together not sayin' anything, and I come along here. And what you think? Jus' afore I got here I ran right agin them two again.

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They must have come back some other way. They stopped at the corner, and the doctor gripped Mr. Luttrell's hand sudden. 'You're a man after my heart,' he says. But Mr. Luttrell laughs a little but not very happy. 'You'd better take didgy—didgytalus,' I think he said; 'your heart must be all wrong.' After that the doctor went back, and Mr. Luttrell went down towards the river and I come in."

Thus Jenny described the first cremation; and Beatrice, listening, drew her own conclusions, and they were not prejudicial to Luttrell. To her then it seemed that, whatever lay in the background, he had done what he had from a sense of duty, and so, in her judgment, he could not be far wrong.

"Has Mr. Luttrell come in yet?" she asked.

"No, mum," Jenny answered, "and I dunno where he's gone."

"I wish he would come, Lottie is very ill." Beatrice looked towards the bed as she spoke. Jenny on the staircase could suggest nothing reassuring, only agree automatically, so Beatrice told her to go to bed.

Jenny went, nothing loth, and Beatrice was once more left alone with her patient. The child was very ill indeed. Tollinger had been during the afternoon and confirmed her fears. He had said her chances were not great, but there was nothing he could do but wait and see if nature could endure the strain. It was useless to send for him again, he could give no help. For that matter Luttrell could not either. Beatrice knew that, yet she wished he was back.

It was very still sitting alone here; there was something almost ghostly in the stillness. She listened, but there was no sound. Jenny must have gone to bed; it was now very late. She bent down and



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looked at the child. She lay in a kind of stupor ; not dead, but as still as death, and in some way fearful. She shivered a little as she looked, and glanced over her shoulder ; she was afraid to have the child die alone with her. She had not been afraid when her father died, though she was in a measure alone with him. There had been trained nurses there, a doctor in attendance, her husband downstairs ; but for all that she had been virtually alone with him, the only creature who understood and could read the language of lip and eye. She had not been afraid then ; she had not really been greatly moved ; she had just been passive and proud and grave, as befitted one of her house. She must have changed since then ; perhaps suffering had changed her, she had suffered ; perhaps the sight of suffering, she had seen it. She could not tell, but she was afraid now of this strange chill departing into the unknown. She wished Luttrell would come. She hid it from herself no longer ; she wanted him, wanted him to come, soon, now, before the end. Not because she thought him a clergyman and so an authority on things spiritual. She was too truly a Curayl to think anything of that ; but because he was himself, because she wanted his human comradeship, the assurance of his strong warm reality in this shadow-land. She wanted him to look into this grim mystery with her, not because it would be clearer to him than to her or less real and tangible—it would likely be to him all it was to her—but he would still take the child by the hand and set her forth to meet it smiling, fearless. Silently the door was pushed open and a man stepped into the circle of shaded light. She had not heard him come, yet before she really saw him she felt his presence and knew that her wish was fulfilled.

“Go and rest,” he said in a whisper. But she shook



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her head. There was, though she did not realize it, something like rest in the relief his coming brought her.

He glanced towards the child, then slipped into a seat by the bed saying nothing. For a time they sat so, she in shadow, he where the light fell upon his face. She could not but see how tired he looked and, remembering what had taken place on the marsh that evening, she felt ashamed to keep him. Indeed, now that his presence had restored her to almost her normal self she felt ashamed of having so desired his coming.

"Won't you go?" she whispered, "you must be very tired."

"Oh, no," he said, but when she urged him again he thought she might have a reason to wish it. "Would you rather be left alone?" he asked.

She shook her head; she was essentially honest. Now she added a confession she was not called upon to make.

"I think I was afraid," she said in a low voice.

"Yes," he answered "of the Unknown. It is very cold, very cold, and so near and we do not know much—"

"Are you afraid too?" she asked.

"I think not," he said thoughtfully. "After all it is only the coming of the dark; afterwards the moon rises, and in time perhaps some sun we do not know. But the coming of the dark is eerie. Yes, I know it—when one sits alone and watches the shadows creep up."

"Yes," she said, very low, and afterwards they spoke no more of his going but relapsed into a silence that was very companionable. So through the long dark hours they sat together and watched.

Just after dawn the change came. Tollinger said

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it was the natural course of events, not surprising, though not to have been foretold with certainty. Beatrice believed, and always would believe, that she and Luttrell in some unexplained way had their share in bringing it about. But whosever work it was it was done ; and when the morning light crept in, Lottie turned on her side, sighing peacefully and sleeping the wholesome sleep of childhood.

Beatrice leaned down to look at her ; then as she straightened herself she met Luttrell's eyes with a question in her own.

He smiled reassuringly. "After all the shadow has not crept close," he said softly.

"She will get better ?"

"She is better. Go and rest now." He began to gently disengage the fingers with which Lottie had taken possession of his hand. Beatrice looked at the sleeping child. "I think not yet," she said.

"She will sleep on a long time," he told her. "Let us call Jenny. She can sit up for a while ; that is all there is to do."

Beatrice gave way and went to fetch Jenny.

Soon that young person, very proud of the trust reposed in her, was installed beside the bed. Luttrell followed Beatrice from the room. There was no landing outside, only a square yard of planking at the stair-head. As they stood there for a minute they could see through the open doorway at the bottom the unshuttered kitchen window and the day coming all fair and misty without.

Instinctively both looked and paused. Then Luttrell began to go downstairs. "I shall go out for a little, I think," he said.

"It looks very beautiful," Beatrice answered, and there was something wistful in her voice.



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Luttrell was half way downstairs. He turned.
"Will you come?" he asked.

The light from the open door above streamed down on his face. He was very like her fancy of the magic piper now, but she did not remember it, for he was touching some note she was fain to hear.

"Will you come?" he said, low so as not to wake the sleeping child.

She ought not perhaps, she should have stayed within call, yet: "Yes," she answered, and came down the stairs quietly as he.

Softly they crossed the kitchen, opened the door and stepped noiselessly out like two truant children into the still, sweet morning. Dew lay thick on everything; the grass was gray with it, the cobwebs all bejewelled. A fine white mist hung in the air, half concealing, half revealing, making the marsh towards which they turned a dreamland. Soon the Waterside cottages were behind them, the wide quiet marsh before; all round the land curved away, green and gray and violet brown, glittering to silver where the first sunbeams struggled through the mist; sweet smelling with the fragrance of things growing and dying, unknown and unheeded, as they had for a hundred years; faintly astir with the half-heard whispers of water, trickling unseen, as it had trickled the seasons round. There was no other sound except once a curlew's cry like the voice of one alone in illimitable space. No soul in sight, nothing but they two and the rising sun and the pale mystery of the morning.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMEWHERE towards eight o'clock in the morning Tollinger set out to see Lottie. He had meant to go earlier, but he had overslept himself. He regretted it as he regretted any failure to do what he had marked out, but not so very much. Beatrice was a fairly capable nurse, he considered ; Luttrell was in the cottage, and certainly they would have sent if they had wanted him.

On his way he met Luttrell coming up from the marsh. He was walking with an elastic step and wore a look of keen enjoyment.

"How's the child ?" Tollinger asked.

"Better, asleep still, I think."

The doctor nodded, then he turned on his heel. There was, it seemed, no need for him to see her yet. However, he did not go, but stopped to put another question.

"What are you doing ?" he asked abruptly.

"I suppose you have been up all night. Why are you not in bed ?"

"I have been out to pay my orisons to the rising sun."

"Bosh !" was Tollinger's comment.

"It was rather," Luttrell agreed ; "that is, if you will let me translate 'bosh' by unwise. It

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was perhaps unwise, but none the less agreeable for that."

Tollinger noticed a tuft of flowering marsh weed in his hand. "Have you been down to the marsh to—to say prayers and that sort of thing?"

"Bless your soul, man, no!" Luttrell answered. "I have been out to look at the morning and walk about and smell the dew."

The doctor appeared not to believe it, but Luttrell said, "Fact, I assure you, I have always been a devotee of Aurora."

"Oh, go to bed, you idiot," Tollinger said, relaxing. "You're as mad as a hatter."

Luttrell laughed; then, as they went together towards the cottage, Tollinger asked if Mrs. Curayl shared the watch by the child. When he heard that she did, he asked if she had gone to bed now.

"I hope so," Luttrell answered; "she started with that idea."

"When?"

Luttrell considered, then gave the time truthfully, and the doctor was a good deal surprised. "I expected the crisis earlier than that," he said.

"If it is any comfort to your medical mind, I can assure you it was earlier by an hour."

"Then why did not Mrs. Curayl go to bed before?"

"Because, like me, she thought she would like to pay her respects to the sun."

Tollinger began to get annoyed. "You mean to say you let her go out in these marsh mists?" he exclaimed. "It is enough to kill her, a woman brought up as she has been! To fag herself to death nursing, as all these ridiculous amateurs do, and then when vitality is lowest and she is tired, to go out in the mist. What were you dreaming of to allow it? I didn't think you were such a fool!"

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"Man," said Luttrell impressively, "let this be a warning to you; never think you know what a fool I can be. You haven't got a plummet that will sound the depths of my folly. You may think me, you possibly do, the biggest fool you can conceive of, but I dare say I'll surprise you yet."

Tollinger gave it up. It was no good arguing or expostulating with Luttrell—he had long ago found that out; and though he was sometimes irritated by him, he never contrived to be as angry as he thought justifiable. They parted at the cottage door, the doctor giving sundry directions as to what Mrs. Curayl was to do, and not do, if she felt any ill effects from the marsh mist. Luttrell listened and promised to give all the messages, though he knew very well they would not be needed. Vitality was not low when she went out with him, rather it was high. Blood ran swift; and youth, which both thought to have left some way behind, showed signs of renewal. It made itself felt in the childish desire to play truant, the childish awe of the holy beauty of the morning; in a something else, vague and unrecognized, not childish at all, but yet young with the youth that is eternal.

Beatrice justified Luttrell's words and took no harm either from the mists or anything else. She returned to her charge with a curious subdued enthusiasm, which outlasted her care of Lottie and carried her on into other work. The days that followed were strange ones to her. She was given work in plenty, for she had her way, and, in spite of Tollinger's original refusal to permit it, nursed fever patients. But she did not find it revolting or hatefully hard; she did not think about it in reference to herself or her own feelings, there seemed somehow no time. She worked till she was tired,



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slept without dreaming, woke without weariness, and planned to serve and help, living for the first time in her life fully and with all her faculties. And in between, in all the gaps and chinks of work, and even running right through it, was Luttrell. They planned together, even laughed together sometimes, talked together often, not always about Waterside affairs. It was at this time that she gradually grew to have the feeling that Luttrell understood, not only what she said, but also what she was and what she felt, and could not very well say. And yet she was not ashamed nor sorry for it.

But after a time a stranger came to the Waterside. Not for a good many days. Lottie had been sent to the seaside by that time to recover her strength. Beatrice and Jenny still lived on in the cottage; there had seemed nowhere else for them to live, and a great deal for them to do, so they stayed there till the worst of the fever was over and the hardest of the work done. It was then that the stranger came to the settlement. He drove there in a dog cart with a fast-trotting horse, and he kept well to the middle of the road, coming quickly; though, to judge by his face, anger as well as fear had something to do with his hurry. Luttrell's cottage was the first one he came to on reaching the Waterside. Jenny was standing on the doorstep shaking a tablecloth and looking down the street that lay dozing in the afternoon sun, when she heard the unusual sound of wheels. Of course she stopped to see who was coming, and so was still on the doorstep when the stranger came in sight. He drew rein as he saw her, and called to her.

Jenny came within speaking distance.

"Where is Lady Goyte-Curayl?" he demanded,

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and Jenny did not approve of the tone of his voice.

"I don't know no sich person," she answered promptly. "She ain't 'ere."

"Nonsense, girl, she is here," the gentleman retorted. "She came here to nurse or to district-visit or something. She is here, I tell you. A lady, young, tall, fair. You must know where she is if you choose to say."

Jenny looked up at an open window in the cottage behind her. She thought it was more than likely Beatrice would hear what she said, and so, since there seemed little doubt she was the person meant, she answered, "Oh, you mean Mrs. Curayl, you do. Why didn't you say what you mean? She's 'ere, fast 'nough. Shall I tell 'er you want 'er? What name'll I say?"

"None," Goyte said shortly, and it was clear that Jenny's words had not tended to soothe his temper.

"Well, I dunno as it matters," she remarked complacently. "I dussay she's 'eard most o' what you said," and with that she disappeared into the cottage.

Beatrice was upstairs, and as Jenny had surmised, she had heard enough of the voices below to feel no surprise when the girl came to tell her some one wanted to see her. "It's some'en in a tantrum," she said, "a'drivin' hisself in a little cart."

Beatrice rose. "I will go down and see him," she said, and went to the stairs. Jenny followed her, but when they got to the kitchen Beatrice noticed the brick floor and said it ought to be scrubbed, and having shut the girl in to do it, she went across the front room to the open door and the sunny roadway where her husband waited.



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He saw her coming, and her unhurried movements and cold high-bred face irritated him curiously. "What the devil is the meaning of this?" he demanded explosively. "What the—what are you doing here?"

"Trying to help my tenants," she answered. "I think I had your permission."

"That I know you hadn't!" he returned. "My permission to come to this place and put up in these piggeries! You know perfectly well that I should never for a moment have allowed such a thing!"

He spoke loudly, not unnaturally angered by her action and her answer, but she remained coldly indifferent to anything he might say. Their last interview, which was as clear in her mind as if it had been but five minutes ago, had made a breach that nothing could heal or bridge for her. She only answered, "I understood you to say that I was at liberty to do what I liked for the Water-side people."

"And if I did, what then? You know what I meant. It's mere prevarication to say you didn't. You knew fast enough that I didn't mean this."

"Certainly I knew it," she replied; "but there was nothing else I could do, so I chose to do this."

"You chose to? Well, then, I chose that you shouldn't do it any more. You'd better come back with me at once, then there won't be any more shilly-shallying or convenient misunderstanding. Fetch your hat and come."

"I'm afraid," she answered quietly, "that is hardly possible just yet; there is a good deal to be done here."

"Not by you," he retorted. "You will come with me, and that at once. It may be suitable for a Curayl to herd in these hovels and nurse paupers,

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but it is not suitable to my wife, and kindly remember that is what you are. Get your hat at once."

But she did not move.

"Do you hear me?" he demanded sharply. It seemed as if he were near losing control of himself; but as she still showed no sign of obeying him a change came over his manner, a certain kind of enjoyment took possession of him, as it did when he had to thrash a disobedient dog or break a mettlesome horse. "It's no good standing there like that," he said, leaning forward with the smile of the man with the whip on his bearded lips, "you will have to come in the end, so you may as well in the beginning. You're my wife, my very loving wife. You're mine, as your clothes are mine and the very food you eat. I buy the lot, and the man that pays is the man in command. You will have to come, so you may as well make up your mind to it."

She raised her head and her nostrils dilated, but she only answered, "I have already told you there is too much to do here for me to be able to go yet."

He laughed derisively. "It's a matter of duty, is it? What about your duty to me? I fancy merely mundane things such as the law would tell you that stood first. I suppose you think if you hold out a bit longer I shall bribe you with the promise of a nurse to do the work which you think you are doing here."

It was just then that Luttrell came out of a house a little higher up. He seemed as if he were coming towards the cottage, but when he saw the two who talked in the roadway he turned about and went back again. Goyte did not notice him, he was not looking in that direction; but Beatrice did. She saw his face and expression, and the inner character it



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represented to her with a preternatural clearness in which imagination must have helped sight. She shivered and turned away her head, then she looked up at her husband with eyes that were dark and glittering. "If you were to send twenty nurses in my place," she said, in low tense tones, "I would not leave the Waterside, and if you were to get an order from the court I would not come with you."

He stared at her for a second, hardly grasping the extent of her low-voiced anger and the revolt it meant; then, "You won't?" he exclaimed, "you refuse?"

"I refuse utterly and entirely."

"You fool——" he began, but she cut him short.

"There is no more to be said. I think we understand each other for once at least," and so saying she left him and went into the house.

"You'll be sorry for this," he said, between his teeth. "You will be sorry before I've done."

But she either did not hear or did not heed, and after a moment he turned his horse's head and drove back more furiously than he had come. And the old gardener at Curayl suffered for his mistress and for the thwarted project of his master.

He, poor man, had no idea that he had done wrong in not returning the letter Goyte had sent to Beatrice at the old house. He could not forward it to her, she had expressively said nothing was to be sent; so he put it by and said nothing until Goyte, not receiving the answer he expected, wrote to know if his wife had left Curayl. In that way he came to know of her going to the Waterside, and, learning it, had come as quickly as possible to fetch her away, less in anxiety for her safety than in a desire to make her recognize his authority. He had failed completely, and by the mention of



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his rights at the wrong moment and the accidental appearance of another man, also at the wrong moment, had come near to the unmasking of things.

Furious, he drove away, back to Curayl; down the rough, little-used road and out of sight. And Beatrice, having fetched her hat, set out for the sick bed where she was expected.



CHAPTER IX

THE end came; of course it was bound to. Luttrell knew that, though it did not prevent him from making the best of the time by the way. In some respects, as he himself said, he was not unsuited for life on an active volcano. It was Beatrice who precipitated matters by mentioning the one subject he had systematically avoided. Still she can hardly be blamed for doing so, for it was much in her mind.

It was some days after her husband had come to the Waterside and gone away again alone. Luttrell had seen him, she knew that perfectly well, but he never so much as referred to his existence; as far as she could remember Sir William's name had never been mentioned since her first coming. Luttrell, like every one else, called her Mrs. Curayl, and made no reference to her husband. But he knew of his existence, and knew, too, all about her and her marriage.

As for what had passed when her husband had come to the Waterside, she did not regret her own part. She had refused utterly to go with him and obey him, and she did not regret it though she knew the consequences might be serious. She did not wish undone what was done, but by degrees she came to wish to talk of it to Luttrell. She

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did not want advice exactly and certainly not to make a confession, she just wanted to speak of it; and, for some reason contrary to her previous ways, to hear another approve of her actions. Luttrell she regarded as a churchman and also a man of the world—an ambassador from on high, and so more or less empowered to hear secrets and speak with authority; but one whose apprenticeship to this world made him to be trusted to advise with discretion. Whatever the motives at work she at last determined to speak of the matter on her mind.

It was one evening just about twilight—on a day when chance had thrown them a good deal together, and the sight of his tenderness to a bereaved mother had wakened her new and almost jealous craving for human sympathy. They had come back to the cottage together and were sitting at the tea which Jenny had got ready for them. They had been silent for some little time when she asked suddenly—“Did you know my husband drove over here some days ago?”

“I concluded it was he,” Luttrell answered briefly.

“And for that reason turned back when you saw us?”

“I thought a third would be in the way.”

“It would have made no difference,” Beatrice said, and something in her tone warned him she was going to demolish polite pretence. “My husband would still have insisted on my leaving the Waterside and I should still have refused.”

Luttrell had rather fancied that was the subject of the discussion, but he only said, “I did not imagine my coming would make any difference, still I thought I would keep out of the way.”

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"Because you thought we were disagreeing?"

He did not answer; he was not going to be the one to tear away the veil which they had always so carefully kept between them and the facts of her life heretofore, he was too well aware of the risk. But she, a Curayl, and so her own sole judge, did not question the wisdom of speech or silence.

"We did disagree," she said, "at least I suppose so; there were things said which will be difficult to forget."

Luttrell nodded, then after a second asked "Do you think—I mean, I'm an outsider, you know, not the sort of man you'd talk to about things. I have no business to ask about your husband's coming, in fact I'm not at all sure I really saw him."

But Beatrice would not have it. "What is the good of pretending?" she asked. "I wonder why we all—I as well as you, more than you—pretend as we do? If only we were simple and plain about things instead of keeping silent, or else advertising to the world 'peace when there is no peace,' I believe a great deal of misery might be saved. Do you know, when my husband came here the other day we spoke plainly, and really understood one another for the first time in our married life."

"And you have been sorry for it ever since?"

Beatrice shook her head. "No," she said, "I am glad of it, and glad too that we made it quite impossible to go back to the old false position."

"Is Sir William glad?" Luttrell asked significantly.

"I suppose not," she answered; "but then he did not know that the old position was false. It is just as well he should understand. Things will

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have to be placed on a new footing now, or else, I suppose, cease."

"That's the abominable disadvantage of speaking one's mind," Luttrell commented; "it's a bit difficult to get back afterwards."

"I do not want to go back," she said; "besides, I had no alternative. I was obliged to act definitely one way or the other."

"I shouldn't say compromise came naturally to you," Luttrell said; "still, there is a lot in its favour sometimes."

"And sometimes," she returned, "it means not courage enough to face the truth or deal with the situation. I have compromised a little in my married life, and submitted a great deal—nearly always submitted, because I was too proud or too cowardly to do anything else. But the other day I had no opportunity to compromise with myself or my husband, no chance, either, to submit with a pretence of self-respect. The choice was to stay or to go; to do what I believed right or to obey what I could not but regard as tyrannical with the humble and unquestioning obedience of a dog. I did not obey."

After a pause Luttrell asked, "You think things will be on a new footing after this?"

"I think my husband will understand that I must be allowed a separate identity, even though I am his bought creature—Oh yes, I am bought; please don't trouble to contradict it. We need not politely pretend that I am not. You yourself said it that night in the churchyard at Curayl—you know it was to me you talked that night. I think you knew it all along."

"Yes," Luttrell said gravely, "I knew, and I have regretted it ever since."

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"Why? It was the truth. I was angry at the time, but that was because it was true and because, though you spoke generally, I applied your words to myself. I know them to be true, at least in my case. I have sold myself with as much completeness and as little honour as ever woman did, without the shadow of affection to glorify the bargain. I am my husband's chattel, his very creature, dependent on his generosity, enriched by his favour, reduced by his frown. I possess nothing as a right, I can claim nothing by love, but I may win what I can by arts and wiles. Do you know why I came to the Waterside? I will tell you. I came, I gave myself, because I had nothing else to give. I was practically penniless. I was obliged to ask my husband as a favour to give of his generosity. But I am not clever at asking and I cannot coax at all; his generosity more readily takes the form of jewellery or dresses, so I asked in vain. I could get nothing to give to the people; there was no choice left me but to come myself. Do you not see how truly your words applied to me?"

He did very well, but he hated to hear her confess it; it hurt him in a curious way as if he, too, were wounded in her dishonouring.

"Why speak of it?" he said. "There is nothing to be done."

"There is something," she answered. "You said there was not that night in the churchyard. You said one must abide by a bad bargain; never repudiate, always fulfil, fulfil smiling to the bitter end. But it is not right, if a thing is bad and dishonourable and impossible—one ought not to go on with it. It is cowardice, not conscience, that makes us go on with such things rather than outrage convention and break them off."

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A light shot up in Luttrell's eyes. "What are you going to do?" he asked, and his voice for all its restraint had an eager ring.

She had meant to make terms with her husband, to come to some definite understanding of her position and his before she went back to him. But at the same time there had been at the back of her mind a feeling that she might never go back, that the rupture might be final and complete. And with the feeling there had been contentment that it should be so, more than contentment, a desire which was growing; which even in the last minutes had grown, until at last it had submerged all else; causing her to forget her just demands and her intention to make terms, and only know that she hated Goyte with a cold unquestioning hatred, and that, for some unfathomable reason, to live with him and be near him was impossible now, repulsive even beyond words. So when Luttrell asked her what she would do she answered steadily, "I shall end it. I shall go back to my husband no more."

"Why?"

The monosyllable came low and tense, an imperious demand. He leaned across the table watching her, another question in his eyes, though since the dim light was behind him she could not see it.

"Because"—she hesitated, shivering a little and looking away—"because—it is impossible. I can't do it."

She spoke weakly as one evading a question that could not be answered. She slipped her hand to and fro along the table nervously, a thing she never did. She was afraid, she did not know of what; she was not of the kind to grasp this situation, but she either would not or could not move while he watched her.

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For a little, he did not know how long or how short a time they sat so, then her hand brushed against a spoon at the edge of the table and it fell to the floor beside her. She stooped to pick it up, so moving out of his line of vision. He made no effort to get it for her, but sat very still, while within him some voice clamoured to be heard. Loudly knocking at the door of his brain it came, surging up in his mind, speaking with his own words—"It is not gentlemanly to repudiate our bargains. We must fulfil, we must fulfil, smile and go on, always go on."

Slowly the youth and passion died out of his eyes, the muscles of his mouth set and his face became gray and old. He turned a little away from the table, looking now, not at her, but out of the window at the fast coming dark. .

"We must all fulfil our bargains," he said at last, in an old tired voice that hardly seemed to be speaking to her.

She had picked the spoon up now and sat staring straight before her, her face white in the twilight. "I cannot do it," she said very low. "I thought I could when I made the contract, but I—I did not know."

He did not turn or speak, and she went on, her voice gathering strength, "You will say I have been long finding it out. I have been married four years and found it endurable, why have I now discovered that it is not? I do not know, but I have. Perhaps I know him better, perhaps I know myself, but it is impossible——"

Luttrell nodded. "I know, I know," he muttered, as if to stop her.

"But you do not," she persisted, "you do not understand——"

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"Do I not?" he said, but he spoke so impersonally, almost apathetically, that it seemed to her he was asking himself, not her. All his warm human interest and sympathy seemed to have burnt out. She was chilled and hurt and made no answer.

Just then there were sounds of Jenny in the kitchen behind. She came in from the yard, her shoes flip-flapping as she came. She was singing some ridiculous rhyme of Luttrell's, with no comprehension of its meaning and little regard to the original tune.

"Oh, have you met Convention, Convention,
All tricked out à la mode?"

"Oh, yes, I've met Convention,
And kicked him down the road."

"Then don't you serve Convention, Convention,
That powerful, painted god?"

"No, I'll never serve Convention
Or any other clod!"

Beatrice listened. She was forced to, for the steam-whistle voice was not to be ignored; it seemed to her very inopportune, almost intrusive.

Luttrell rose. "Shall I light the lamp?" he asked. He lighted it without waiting for an answer, and Jenny, having finished in the kitchen, went upstairs, leaving quiet behind her.

He sat down again, drawing his chair to the table. His manner had undergone a complete change; he might almost have been a different person. "Since you have honoured me with your confidence," he said with the deliberate kindness of a family lawyer, "should you mind if I asked you to explain the case a little more fully?"

"Do you mean my marriage?" Beatrice asked. "There is nothing to explain."

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There was neither interest nor encouragement in her tone, but he went on—"You made it, I imagine, with some end in view. How far has it fulfilled your expectations? I presume you had for object something not otherwise obtainable, which you felt bound to get even at a high price?"

"Yes," she said wearily, "that was it. I did it for Curayl."

"And has it failed? Curayl is a place, a house and a name. Has your marriage failed to help all?"

"It has not helped the place, it has done little for the house, but it has saved the name from disgrace, so I suppose it is not altogether a failure. Why do you ask?"

"Because when one has got a doubtful bargain, is it not as well to look the thing all over before deciding that it is hopelessly bad?"

"From a purely business point of view the thing is not altogether a failure," she admitted. "If it were only a commercial contract I could not complain of having got much less than I actually bargained for. There were no marriage settlements. I did not demand any definite price to be paid to me; nor were there any terms made to provide for Curayl. Sir William made me a verbal promise to do what was necessary for the house, and he keeps it to the letter. Beyond that he was not bound to do anything or spend anything for me or mine, he had already spent it for my fa—for the name; that was where the absolute purchase money was paid."

Luttrell nodded. He could not trust himself to look at her, but he went on steadily—"If a man has received the price named, even if it is very inadequate, and fails to do what he has undertaken, how does he stand?"

He put the question gently. She flushed, but

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defended the position. "The price named was less than the price implied," she said. "When I made the bargain I thought I was dealing with a gentle—with a different kind of person. I did not realize the sort of man he was. I did not expect it to be a pound of flesh bargain."

"Possibly Antonio did not expect it either when he made that famous contract."

She bit her lip ; then she said, "Plainly, then, you mean that, having received my bare price, I am bound to fulfil the contract ; that, in fact, you think I have no right to break with my husband ? "

"What is one to think ? " he asked. "If it were anything but a marriage contract how would it strike you yourself ? "

She did not answer, and he altered the lamp flame. It did not need altering, and after he had turned it up he lowered it again to its original height.

"When one has made a mistake," he said with his eyes on the light, "and can't remedy it, one does not want to publicly lament the fact."

"I had no idea of doing such a thing," she said rather haughtily.

"If you leave your husband do you not notify to the public the mistake of your marriage ? "

She neither admitted nor denied it, and there was a silence during which they heard Jenny moving about overhead. At last she said : "Then you say 'Go back' ? "

"Yes," he answered, "go back. Make terms—you are in a position to do that—but go back."

He spoke quietly, with an earnestness that came of restraint in his voice, but afterwards he looked across at her drawn brows and lowered eyelids with a look terribly at variance with his words. He waited for her answer, all of him waited for it.



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If she should refuse again, if she should declare it impossible—what then ? ”

But she did not. She looked up suddenly, and the tears in her eyes dimmed them so she did not see him plainly : “ Forgive me,” she said, “ I have been very wrong. You are right, it would be cowardly and dishonourable to repudiate the bargain. I am bound, bound altogether. I cannot draw back now ; if I did I should to the end despise myself, as you might have despised me now for thinking of it. Thank you for your patience and showing me the right. You have been very patient and gentle.”

Luttrell turned away for a moment. He could not meet her clear direct gaze. He had won ; he had tried to win her back for Goyte, and he had done it. But if he had lost—if only he had lost !

And she, all unconscious, went on—“ I think you must be a very wise preacher, you make the way plain and possible. I could fancy that your gospel would always be one not beyond human reach.”

Luttrell cut her short abruptly. “ You are making a great mistake,” he said.

She looked surprised. “ Not in your meaning,” she said quickly.

“ No,” he answered, “ in me.”

“ I do not pretend to understand you,” she said, but he took no notice.

“ Have you told me all that you have because I am a clergyman ? ” he asked.

She was plainly astonished. “ I told you because ”—she hesitated—“ because I wanted help, I suppose. You are a clergyman and a man of experience, and—and yourself, and you could give it.”

“ I am a hypocrite,” he answered, “ a hypocrite,

sort of religion, no right to say
over those that die of typhus, no
thing that you or another may say
of the clerical office. The whole
and a fraud to which no one
party."

So he spoke, and Beatrice sat re-
eyed.

"Do you mean this?" she asked.
Pain in her voice did not delude her
of mercy. There was none.
colossal lie from one whose instinct
dealing and truth. "Have you
along?"

He nodded. "Yes," he said; "I
me for a clergyman in the pulpit
the churchyard afterwards. And
of it regarded me in the same li-

She rose without speaking; slowly.
queenly dignity of manner she
"Thank you for enlightening me."
she reached the door.

He opened it for her. "I know
able," he said.

"I have no doubt you had some



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whom she had come to believe, fell from her ideal of him.

But Luttrell did not see. She passed out of the room and left him, and he went slowly back to the table.



CHAPTER X

TOLLINGER stood reading a letter thoughtfully. It was eight o'clock in the evening. He had just come in and found it waiting for him. It was from Luttrell, and appeared to have been written hurriedly. It ran—

“Can you see Mrs. Curayl this evening? Make some excuse to do it, she won't see you without. When you see her, assure her that she ought to leave the Waterside at once, unless she wishes to break down and be ill here. I believe she would go if she had a sufficient reason. The worst is over, and there is little left for her to do. She could go with a clear conscience on a good excuse——”

“And I am to give her the excuse?” Tollinger commented; then read the note again. There was a postscript. “I have just been sent for by some one at the other end of the village. You had perhaps better not mention me to Mrs. Curayl.”

Tollinger read this too, then tore the letter up and went out. He was not given to asking even himself those unwise questions by which a man learns nothing, but the limit of his neighbour's patience and the limitlessness of his duplicity. So he troubled himself not at all about motives, but started on his errand at once.

Luttrell had been gone some time now. He had



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been sent for comparatively soon after Beatrice went upstairs and left him. He went at once, only staying to write the note which the same boy who fetched him took to the doctor. He did not come back all night, but stayed watching with the dying man. An incredibly long night he found it ; very black too, fit time for a man to think, with darkness and dead silence, a background against which things show nakedly.

But Tollinger in the meantime prevailed with Beatrice. He pressed his point with a diplomacy that was wonderful with him and carried it, though that may possibly have been owing to the fact that he was helped by allies within. Anyhow the day was gained : she would go ; she said it was no doubt wiser to do so, she was certainly very tired. She would go early to-morrow morning ; it would make less disturbance ; no one would then think it necessary to say good-bye to her. Tollinger agreed, and said he would see about getting a conveyance for her.

This she would not have. "I will walk," she said. "I would rather. My things ? I have not many here, and I will not take them away, they might carry infection. I will destroy them before I go."

Such extreme precautions were not quite necessary ; nevertheless when the doctor was gone Beatrice carried them out, perhaps not entirely for fear of infection. Jenny assisted, looking on with envious eyes as the garments were burned in the kitchen grate ; her eyes were red as well as envious, and she sniffed at intervals. She cried long and noisily at the idea of losing her lady. Beatrice tried to comfort her, assuring her that she should not be forgotten, but as soon as possible be placed where she could



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be trained as a lady's maid—that was her wish, she wanted to wait on Beatrice. The promise partly pacified her, and though she continued to cry a little she helped with the preparations, and also gave her word to go down to the marsh cottage, when Beatrice should be gone and there obey orders. Having settled this matter, Beatrice with the girl's help cleared the cottage of all signs of her occupancy, and set it in perfect order; then she went to bed for a short night.

It was early the next morning when she rose. Luttrell was not back; indeed, no one at the Water-side seemed astir. She gave Jenny some bread and milk, but herself took nothing, spending the time putting the last few tidy touches to the house. When all was ready she went out, closing the door after her, quietly and definitely, as she intended to close the incident in her life. It was a white morning, the sun just struggling through the mist, the air very chilly, for October was advanced. Everywhere one could feel the autumn, could smell it in the air, hear it in the plaintive piping of some hidden robin, know in a thousand ways that winter was coming fast. Beatrice shivered involuntarily as she turned to close the door. Jenny stood waiting in the roadway. She looked up and down to see if there was any one to watch them start and say good-bye to Mrs. Curayl. There was no one, no one at all. It seemed rather remiss to the girl, for her lady was, and always would be, a very great lady to her.

Perhaps the same idea of remissness occurred to Tollinger, as he came hurrying down the road at that minute. He quite approved of Mrs. Curayl's way of going; in fact, having a dislike for what he called fuss, he thought it surprisingly sensible for



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a woman. Still it struck him as a little bit cheerless, and it was because he was afraid it might also seem so to her that he had hurried out to see her start.

She had just succeeded in fastening the door, and, turning, saw him. "Have you come to put us on our separate ways?" she said, "it is very kind of you."

He had meant to make an excuse, say he was called out early or something, but for once he did not spoil a kind act by an ungracious speech.

"I thought I'd see this little vagabond start for the marsh cottage," he said, pinching Jenny's shoulder.

"I shan't be there long," Jenny retorted gaily. "Soon I'll be going right away and never coming back. When I'm your maid we shan't never come back here, shall we, mum?" she asked.

"No," Beatrice answered, "we shall never come back."

The tone was not gay, it was very grave indeed, but Jenny was quite satisfied, and without any return of last night's tears said her good-bye and set off for the cottage. Beatrice stood a minute to watch her go; Tollinger waited with her. At last they moved, the settlement was behind now, the lonely way before, plain in the lifting mist.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand, "and thank you so much for coming to see me off."

"Good-bye," Tollinger answered, "and—thank you. You've done some good work here and not got much gratitude or thanks either, but it's good work all the same, lasting work, if it's any consolation to you to know it, and it can't be altogether wasted."

He spoke abruptly and awkwardly, and turned away directly after, as if he were in a hurry to get



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back, but he wrung her hand hard, forgetting for the moment that she was the unapproachable lady and knowing only that she was a very lonely woman. Then he went back to the Waterside, and Beatrice went on alone into the morning mist.

It was not till a good deal later in the day that Tollinger came across Luttrell and gave him the news of Beatrice's departure.

Luttrell did not seem surprised, although he had not been back to the cottage to find the fact out for himself. He did not go back there all day, he said he had no time, and got his meals elsewhere. He could always be sure of a meal, so long as people at the Waterside had anything to eat, for though he was their hero, he was a hero one could invite to eat bread and dripping in the kitchen. So all day he kept away, finding plenty to do ; but just about twilight the calls on him ceased, and there seemed nothing more to be done. With a cessation of work there came also a sudden knowledge that he was very tired. Slowly, and with an overwhelming sense of weariness, he set out for the little house that had come to be home to him. On the way there he met Tollinger, and uninvited the doctor turned his steps and walked with him. As they went they spoke of affairs at the Waterside and the progress of the fever, which had now almost exhausted itself, and Luttrell, in spite of the weariness, more than bore his part. He held very strongly to the old pride, which maintains that a man should not dress his wounds in public, or even refer to his vulnerabilities. In time they came to the cottage. It was quiet and dark, exactly as Beatrice had left it in the morning ; no smoke from the chimney, no light at the window ; nowhere, within or without, the indefinable sense of welcome that Luttrell had

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found on his return there many nights. He lifted the latch and went in, inviting Tollinger to follow. He knew very well that the doctor could not follow into the recesses of his mind or share anything that might be there. Accordingly, though he may have wished him away—but even that is not clear, for bodily presence is a small matter to the man with an impregnably solitary mind—he asked him to come in.

Tollinger stumbled over the doorstep and felt his way across the dark room. "Where is the lamp?" he asked.

"Here," Luttrell answered.

It stood ready filled and trimmed. Soon it was lighted and for the first time the doctor noticed how tired and old his companion looked—years older than he had thought him before.

"I believe I am very hungry," Luttrell said, "do you mind waiting while I go and see what I can find?"

He went through to the kitchen behind and Tollinger waited alone, looking round and noticing the extreme neatness of the place. Probably the kitchen was equally neat, but it was some little while before Luttrell seemed able to find what he wanted. When he did open the door between the two rooms he said—"Won't you come in here, I've got the fire alight."

Tollinger came, and the door was carefully shut after him. Luttrell did not want to see into that other room.

"She set things straight before she left," the doctor observed, looking at the orderly dresser. "She had got more sense than I gave her credit for. She did good work while she was here; I own it, though I was opposed to her coming, and when there

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was no more need for her she took advice and went away sensibly without any fuss."

Luttrell said nothing, only stirred the fire; and the doctor, fearing lest his unwonted gallantry of the morning should be discovered, apologized for it now since he had forgotten to mention it before.

"I saw her start," he said. "You couldn't, and I thought somebody ought. I came along just as she was leaving. She had cleared the house, settled everything, and just walked quietly out shutting the door after her, and there was an end of the whole business."

Luttrell stirred the fire again; then he remarked, "Did it ever strike you that generally there is not an end?"

"An end?" Tollinger said. "Of course there is."

"There's mostly a sequel."

"Don't approve of sequels."

"Neither do I, but sometimes they are unavoidable. I have tried ending things before now, shutting them in water-tight compartments, in fact, but it does not often come off. The compartments don't fit quite; something from the last affair creeps out into the next or next but one."

"That's not my experience," Tollinger maintained, "and I don't see it need be yours. Take this Waterside business, for instance. When we leave here it will be done with altogether. I shan't have anything more to do with the place or the people, neither will you."

"I have still got that packet to deliver."

Tollinger had forgotten the packet; to tell the truth Luttrell had too, for a time, there had been so many other things to think of. Now that he spoke



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of it the doctor remembered it and the little they knew about it.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "You will never find who it is meant for unless you open it; probably not then."

Luttrell thought that quite possible. "Still, I shall try," he said. "I shall go and see Mrs. Wythe again before I leave the Waterside, and see if I can find out anything more from her. Oh, I don't mean the truth, but I may be able to deduce something from her lies."

"You won't," Tollinger assured him, "it'll be a clear waste of time. I shouldn't bother after the thing any more. Open it, and then if you can discover who it is meant for, send it to her; if not—let it go, very likely it is only rubbish."

"Very likely," Luttrell agreed. "Still, I can't exactly do that. I promised to deliver it intact, and I have a fancy to do so, if I can, seeing that I got it under rather unusual circumstances, rather under false pretences in fact."

"False pretences?" Tollinger repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Pretty much what I say," Luttrell answered. "I will tell you about it. There is not any need, I know, but you may as well hear it. I will tell you the whole truth."

And he told it, the entire episode, doubtless better than last night. Then a sudden passion made him declare facts nakedly, telling both less and more than the truth, and from very pride leaving out all the details and circumstances which might have made it comprehensible. To-night it was different: he was sick of the whole thing and totally indifferent as to how he presented it; but he told all, and he was too inherently a speaker to tell a tale wholly amiss



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when he told it in cold blood, even when he did not care what effect he produced. To-night's listener, too, was different ; Tollinger had no personal feeling in the matter, he had staked nothing upon the recounter's integrity. Luttrell to him was merely a man ; the nominal priesthood was a forgettable accident ; but as man he had worked with him, stood side by side with him through a bad time and come to accept him and like him as he found him. Therefore it came about that now he avowed himself not to be what he had before called himself, but not seemed, it did not alter what he was to the doctor. He might have called himself king or costermonger equally as well as clergyman or the reverse, his curious personality and his ability to deal with a situation would still have remained, and, it is to be feared, Tollinger's allegiance with it.

It was late that night before the doctor left the cottage. He was well on his homeward way before he remembered one question he had not asked, the question as to how much of what he had just heard Mrs. Curayl knew. Did she know ? Did she not know ? Had Luttrell sent her away because he was afraid she was finding out ? Or had she gone in disgust because she had found out ? He asked himself, but he asked no other, which was wise.

CHAPTER XI

IT was not till the day before he left the Water-side that Luttrell went to see Mrs. Wythe. The old woman still lived in her crazy house, as she had continued to do throughout the epidemic. It had been disinfected and fumigated enough even to satisfy Tollinger, but in appearance it still remained much as it was on the night of Luttrell's first coming—at least so it seemed to him, when he sought her there. She was crouching over the fire in the front room, the one with the rat hole in the floor, when he came in. She looked up with twinkling eyes at his entrance.

"Come in, come in," she said. "I knew you'd come to me. They all come sooner or later, all of 'em, ladies and gentlemen too—they all come to Mother Wythe, she can help 'em to this and that."

Luttrell shut the door, then drew a stool to the fire and sat down. "Yes," he said, "I do want your help, that's what I've come for. The question is, are you going to give it?"

"Oh, I'll give it," she answered readily. "I always give it. I can, too; I know a thing or two."

"There's no doubt about that," Luttrell agreed. "You have lived, that's what you have done."

The old woman laughed as if he had paid her a compliment. "Well, well," she said, "and what do you want?"

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"A woman," he answered. "I want your help——"

"A woman," she said, chuckling again. "I should have thought you could have helped yourself to that. You may ha' done already for ought I or Sir Anyone else is the wiser. You were under the same roof with her."

Luttrell chose to treat this as an aside not to be answered. "Unfortunately," he said, "I can't help myself in this matter. I don't know the name of the woman I want, nor where she lives nor anything about her, except that she was a friend or relative of your late lodger, Caser."

"Oh, her," Mrs. Wythe said; then she leaned forward and lay a skinny finger on his knee. "Why don't you see to your own business first?" she asked, leering up at him. "You're not so young; you haven't so much time to spare—see to your own woman first, and Caser's after, that's Mother Wythe's advice."

"Excellent," Luttrell agreed, "if only I had a woman to see after, but unhappily I haven't, so I must content myself with looking for Caser's."

Mrs. Wythe nodded. "She's gone away," she said. "Oh, I know it, I know most o' what goes on here and elsewhere too sometimes. I've seen her these plenty times, white and proud and cold as the snow. He! he! A Curayl! Her father was a Curayl. I knew him very well. I know what's under Curayl ice too,—so might you if you tried."

But still Luttrell would not be drawn; even to an expression of anger or disgust. "I didn't try," he said, "and for the best of all reasons, because I did not want to know. The thing I want to know is about Caser's woman."

Mrs. Wythe would not give up yet. "I'll tell you

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what's underneath," she said confidentially, "hell. That's what's there. When she went away there was hot hell under the ice."

"On the whole, perhaps, the best place for it," Luttrell suggested. "If I had got to have hot hell I don't know but what I'd sooner have it iced, wouldn't you?"

"No," Mrs. Wythe answered. "I'd have it hot—hot—hot! Close, near; so'd you, if something hadn't come between," and she grinned up at him maliciously. Then she turned to the fire and spread out her hands to the blaze. "Well," she said, "go on. What d'ye want of the old woman? Who's Caser? Where'd he come from? What's he bin doin'? I'll tell you, if you like. Give me a minute to make it up first, for, Lord love me, if I know anything without."

"Five minutes if you like," Luttrell said. "Make up his woman too, the one to whom I'm to give the packet. Make it up three different ways and tell me them all, then we are sure to get a good one. I am rather a hand at making up myself. Shall we do it between us? Let us have Caser a thief, to begin with, and his woman a relation of yours, honest—no, moderately honest and not living here. Or shall we have him a gentleman come down in the world, in your power and fallen into bad habits through you? The woman might be his wife whose heart he had broken—or somebody else's wife whom you have helped him to. We shall be able to invent something good between us."

Mrs. Wythe looked up with a wry smile. "You're a sportsman, that's what you are," she said, not without a touch of appreciation. "I thought the stock had run out, but they ain't. It beats me why you didn't——"



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"Find Caser's woman without coming to you?" Luttrell finished for her, though it certainly was not what she meant to say. "I'll tell you why, because then I should have missed the unique pleasure of this visit. You and I understand one another rather well. It would have been a pity if we had missed a talk. It is your turn to tell a tale now. Go on, never mind about the truth."

She went on, and did not mind about it. She told a whole series of fabrications about Caser, and when Luttrell went back over the story and cross-questioned her, so that she contradicted herself, she was ready to start a fresh and different tale. In this way they spent an hour; at the end of it Luttrell was a little the wiser. Partly from what she had not said, and partly from what he had himself suggested, he deduced something to go upon. Caser's connexion with Mrs. Wythe was of old standing, dating back certainly to Major Curayl's lifetime. Caser's woman was either known to, or connected with, Mrs. Wythe, and lived originally in this part of the country, though it seemed more than unlikely that she was there now, seeing that she had not been sent for to receive the packet herself. As for the contents, it was doubtful if Mrs. Wythe really knew what it was, but concluded it to be of considerable value or else great importance to the woman, as it seemed that Caser ran some risk in bringing it. This was all Luttrell was able to gather, still he was not dissatisfied, it was a good deal better than nothing.

"Thank you so much," he said, as he rose to go. "I am tremendously obliged to you. You have helped me no end, you know. Good-bye, I'll let you know when I find her."

"When!" the old woman said, laughing contemptuously, and not moving to see him to the door



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"Better see to your own affairs first, mister," she called after him; "your hair's gettin' gray; don't waste time!"

She screamed the last, for Luttrell was outside and shutting the door. Then she turned back to the fire and once more spread her chilly hands to the blaze. But she did not lean forward as before; she was listening. There was some one approaching outside. Her hearing was still good, and she could distinguish steps crossing her little enclosed yard, not the steps that had just gone away, others not much more familiar with the dark rubbish-strewn place. The man who drew near must have just about passed the man who went away in the archway of the yard.

There came a tap on the door. "Come in," she said and the new-comer entered.

He was a young man, younger than Luttrell, much better looking and very well dressed. Mrs. Wythe looked at him and smiled either in welcome or in recognition. "Ned Delmer!" she said. "What, you come to the old woman too? Sit down, sit down. What can I do for you?"

The young man accepted the invitation but looked rather uneasily round the close little room. "They say you have had fever out here," he said, "but it is over now—is that true?"

"Quite true, my lamb," Mrs. Wythe answered soothingly. "You're like your father—a handsome man, a handsome man, very like the Major—with a difference."

"Yes," Delmer agreed, "with a difference. I am a poor man and he was a rich one; or rather he had a genius for living on rich ones which is even better. I tell you what it is, I'm damnably hard up, that's why I've come to you."

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Mrs. Wythe grinned somewhat sardonically. "What would you have?" she asked. "How is the poor old woman to help you?"

"That's just it," Delmer said. "I want your advice. You're something of a genius in that direction too. You used to get money out of that old blackguard. You were the only person who did. But you used to help him too. I never understood the business."

"No," Mrs. Wythe said; "no—oh no," and she nodded. "You wouldn't understand that business; you're not like your father there. I got money out of him, that's true; he had to pay, but I was the only one who ever got a penny for a quiet tongue. And I helped him, that's true. For why? Because I had a mind to. We made a pact—he'd ha' made a pact with the devil. He knew better than to make enemies. He was a good loser, though he had little practice at it."

But her visitor did not seem interested in these reminiscences; he was following out his own train of thought. "If," said he, "you got money out of him, you must have had him in your power very considerably; you must have been able to prove something about him a good deal more inconvenient than any one else could. That secret ought to be worth something still. The legitimate head of our respectable house, Lady Goyte-Curayl, would pay a good deal for the sake of the name."

"I have never had a penny from her," Mrs. Wythe declared.

"That's no reason why you never should."

"I don't want it," she returned, "the Major treated me fair enough. Oh, I know I was the only one, but he did. I told you he was a good loser; he lost well to me. I don't want money, I've got all



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I want. Lady Goyte's not my fancy ; devil take her and her money too ! ”

“ I'd rather take it myself, thanks,” Delmer said. “ See here, you must help me to something. We'll go shares if you like, but you must help me as you helped my father before me. Let's talk things over.”

He drew a little closer and began with all the persuasiveness of which he was past master. Seeing that he was unhampered by any scruples and had inherited something of Major Curayl's inimitable manner, he ought to have succeeded. But Mrs. Wythe had known the father and not been too blinded by his charm to make a moderate profit out of the acquaintanceship ; therefore, though she had a certain liking for the son as his son, she was not over-persuaded by his lesser abilities.

“ No,” she said, when she had listened to his wiles long enough, “ I ain't goin' to part with it for you. I wouldn't for him, and I won't for you—it's only a bit o' paper, you didn't know that, did yer ? Well, it is, and it'd be worth something to you, as it was to me, but you're not goin' to have it, not even to spite my white lady. I'll tell you somethin' about her, though—you can make what you can of it. She's been here these weeks past ; she's gone now, but she was here living in a cottage with—not Sir What's name anyhow.”

“ Oh ? ” Delmer said. “ Might have chosen a better and safer place too.”

“ Why ? ” the old woman asked. “ Who'd tell ? She's a Curayl ; who'd find fault with her here ? ”

“ You might, or I might.” Delmer suggested.

Mrs. Wythe agreed, then she leaned forward. “ I'll tell you something,” she said confidentially—“ there isn't no fault to find,” and she laughed

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maliciously in his face. "How do I know?" she said when she had her breath again. "Oh, I know. I know men, Mr. Delmer. I haven't lived so long and not found 'em out. It's no good comin' to the old woman with one tale on the lips and another in the head—she finds out. A printed book ain't much good to me, but a face, mister, give me a face and I'll read it to—myself. I've read this one's."

"I dare say," Delmer said indifferently, "but it is not to be expected that the husband has your powers; the appearance of things is likely to be quite enough for a middle-class beast with his prejudices. Her ladyship might find herself in a tight place if any one were to——"

The old woman nodded comprehendingly, although she said: "I don't know nothink about them things."

"What's the man's name?" Delmer asked.

"Luttrell. He's been seein' after fever and other folk's business; nothin' to look at, but that don't stand in the way of a lady's fancy."

Delmer rose. It seemed clear to him that he would not hear anything else of value. He bade a brief good-bye and went to the door. The old woman watched him with something of contempt on her shrivelled face. He was Major Curayl's son, and sufficiently like his father to make some sort of appeal to her loyal if warped affection for that aristocratic sinner, but apart from that she did not think highly of him. In her estimation he was not in all respects the man her last visitor was.

"Did you meet some one goin' out as you come in?" she asked as he lifted the latch.

"Yes."

"That's Luttrell."

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He dropped the latch and turned about. "Was it?" he said, "I did not see him well——"

"No, and if you had you couldn't 'a seen anything worth rememberin' but I'll tell you somethin'. If you go to him with any talk about Goyte or the cottage, or anythin' of that sort, you'll get yourself as sound a thrashin' as you need want. It's kicks, not ha'pence, you'd earn there. He's not the party for you to tackle, I warn yer; you're not up to it."

It may have been by reason of this advice, or it may have been for fear of some lurking danger of fever, something prevented Delmer from lingering much longer at the Waterside. So soon as he came from under the archway of Mrs. Wythe's house he turned sharply to the left and set out in the direction of Curayl. The afternoon was already advanced, he had stayed some time in the crazy house by the river. It would be almost dark before he reached Curayl, for the road was long, and though fairly level in many places very rough and ill kept. He wished there was some other means of getting there, but there was none, so he was forced to walk the lonely winding road.

Beatrice had been back at Curayl some time now. On her first return she found herself feeling faintly surprised that the place had not altered since she was away, it seemed so long ago that she went. Even after so many days she was not quite used to it and found almost a relief in the changes the weeks had made in the gardens. Again that afternoon she went out to mark how frost had touched the more tender plants, so that the flowers hung limp and blackened, and how in sheltered spots the damp had settled, lying green and slimy on untrodden ways. She went down the weedy paths,



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across the thick green grass, along by the terraced walk. The rose trees that overhung the broken wall were flowerless now, though still dressed in leaves; there were leaves in many places, deeply rankly green; it had not been a golden autumn, they only shivered and fell as they were. The birds were all gone; even the robins that sang so shrilly away by the Waterside seemed to have gone from here. Here was only silence, the feeling of the coming end, the passed zenith—seed-time, summer, harvest, they had come and gone, and still her garners were empty.

She went back to the house where her footsteps echoed in the hall and her shadow followed her up the stairs, and the dust that distils from old, old wood gathered daily in the sombre rooms. Here, too, was silence. Before there had been peace at Curayl, rest in the quiet, a ghost of lost youth in the monotonous days; now there was only silence, silence that had fallen thick as the dust on the worm-eaten boards. She took her way up the highest stairs to a small room right up in the roof. She had never used it before, but she fancied it now, and had brought there the things she most often wanted. Her embroidery lay on the table, glowing flowers finely worked on satin. Some books were beside it; they dealt with the abstract, analysing emotion, and trying to crystallize the inexpressible into words. She crossed the room without heeding them, and sat down by the window that looked eastward across the gardens to the flat land and the marsh that lay a grey blur in the mist.

She was still sitting there looking out when the old gardener's wife came to tell her of a visitor. The servants had not come back. Beatrice on her return had not roused herself to make any change; the



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old woman could do all that was needed for the uncertain time she might remain at Curayl. It was she, accordingly, who opened the door to Delmer when at twilight he reached the great grey house, and she who took his name to her mistress.

Beatrice rose at once, almost as if she thought of preventing her visitor's entrance to this little sanctuary, if by any chance he had followed his name up the winding stair.

"Is he in the small drawing-room?" she asked. "I will see him there." And she went with a feeling of annoyance that any one should have broken in upon her retirement, more especially, perhaps, that this man should.

It was some years since she had seen him, and she had no desire to renew the acquaintanceship. She acknowledged no tie of blood between them, and she personally disliked the little she knew of him. He had been to Curayl before during her father's life; the Major at one time had tolerantly acknowledged the young man as "one of the mistakes of my youth," and when he was of an age to be companionable had sometimes had him with him in town and once or twice at Curayl. But the father and son were not always on good terms, and though the elder man had occasionally helped the younger out of difficulties, he had more than once expressed himself pained by his want of taste. In the end they came to a definite split; something occurred which disgusted the Major entirely, and he put an end to the connection, warning his son never to address him again. "A fool," he had called him to Beatrice at the time, "and entirely without the instincts of a gentleman. A mere glutton in his disgusting appetites, with less refinement or discretion than an African or a hog."



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Beatrice knew more perhaps of this affair than was necessary, and though the details did not prejudice her in Delmer's favour, she could not hold him all to blame ; her sense of justice told her that her father was scarcely the person to pass condemnation.

All this had occurred some time before her marriage. Since then she had seen nothing of Delmer, nor so much as heard his name mentioned. Yet this afternoon he had come to see her. She wondered why, guessing even before she saw him that he must be in need of something. She scrutinized his handsome face in the lamplight. He was not many years older than she, little more than thirty, but he looked more. He had altered since she last saw him. She was no student of faces, but she knew that it was not only in beauty that this alteration was for the worse. Her old dislike of him had not gone ; she still felt very much the same about him, though she had grown to womanhood since she last saw him.

He, for his part, seemed to find her changed ; at least he remarked on it, and for a little they exchanged polite commonplaces. Then he turned the conversation abruptly, coming, she instinctively felt, a step nearer to the object of the visit : " So the old man's dead ? " he said.

" My father ? " she inquired.

" Our father," he corrected. " I didn't hear of it. I was in South America at the time. I suppose he cut up badly ? "

" You mean ? "

" That he didn't leave much. He wouldn't have left it to me anyhow."

" There was very little to leave, only Curayl, practically nothing besides ; if there had been any money you would have had a share."

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She meant that she herself would have given it him, but he affected to believe the Major, relenting towards him, would have bequeathed it.

"I don't deny it would have come in useful if there had been a trifle," he said. "I'm confoundedly hard up. That's a feeling, by the way, that you know nothing about in these days—you've married a Croesus, I hear."

"Marrying a rich man does not necessarily mean being rich oneself," Beatrice said.

"No," Delmer admitted; "but it means being able to put your hand on a little money if you really want it, if it is necessary for anything."

Beatrice's lips set; she experienced something of her father's disgust at Delmer's way of going to work; she would rather he asked frankly for the money she could not raise, than speak and look with vague insinuations. "I am sorry," she said haughtily; "I can command absolutely nothing at all. I cannot explain to you how this is so" (she need not to him go into the details of that bad bargain), "but you must believe me that I could not, if I would, let you have so much as a ten pound note."

"Not by way of a loan?" Delmer asked, not apparently at all disappointed, "a loan to be repaid at—leisure?"

"No."

Still Delmer did not seem disconcerted. He changed the subject with rather suspicious abruptness. "You have been at the village by the river, I hear, looking after fever and so on."

"Yes," she answered, wondering a little how he had come by the information.

"There was a fellow Luttrell, there, rather a particular friend of yours." Delmer went on watching her.

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For a moment Beatrice's eyes glittered, but her look at the mention of the name was scarcely that of surprised affection. "There was a Mr. Luttrell there," she said coldly. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing; you seem to have got on very well together, that's all. Been pretty intimate, perhaps rather more so than prejudiced people, Goyte for instance, would approve."

Beatrice was for a moment too astonished to speak; then—"How dare you say such a thing!" she said in low-voiced anger.

"My dear lady," Delmer replied, "don't be angry; I don't blame you, far be it from me—if you like that kind of man and a cottage by the river instead of a villa in a more salubrious spot, it isn't for me to find fault with your taste; only Goyte may——"

But there she stopped him, but not to indignantly demand that he should go, or cease these insulting insinuations. The matter she felt was not one to be so dealt with. It could not be left thus, she must know more—how he had come by what real information he had, and on what he had dared to base this astounding and outrageous charge. It must be admitted that concealment from her husband and her own safety were not the thoughts uppermost in her mind; rather, for pride's sake, to keep the thing from Luttrell's ears. It would be a last and insupportable humiliation if he were to hear this disgusting insinuation about the intimacy which already was regrettable enough.

"I am utterly at a loss to understand you," she said. "Kindly explain yourself. You know as well as I do that every word you say is false."

Delmer shrugged his shoulders. "Appearances are against you," he said; "you seem to have spent



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a good while in that cottage, somewhat insufficiently chaperoned. Oh, I don't say it wasn't all right; the question is whether Goyte will think so too."

"That," Beatrice said, "is scarcely a question which need trouble you."

"You—you mean," Delmer corrected, "as Goyte, you think, will know nothing about the affair. But I am afraid you are rather mistaken. Goyte may after all hear about it; in fact I shouldn't wonder if he did, unless—Well, I am placed in rather an awkward position."

"Do you mean unless I give you money?" Beatrice's lips curled as she asked the question. "In plain terms you are here for blackmail—to be paid for silence?"

"I told you at the outset I was awfully hard up and hoped you would be able to manage—a little loan."

"And I told you at the outset I had no money at command. I could not, if I would, put my hand on ten pounds."

Delmer nodded. "Yes," he said, "but that was before we had discussed your friend. One never knows what one can do till one is put to it."

"There is one thing," Beatrice returned, "I am in the habit of doing, that is speaking the truth. When I told you I could not let you have money, it was true. I could not then, and now—I would not if I could."

"That's very awkward," Delmer said gravely, "because I've got to have money, and if you can't let me have it I shall have to see if I can't get a loan from some one else, Luttrell, or Goyte perhaps——"



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Beatrice bit her lip. If he went to Luttrell ! Or to Goyte, and she and Luttrell, and possibly his fraud, were dragged into explanation and publicity. It was hard to say which alternative was the worse. Her pride shrank from either equally ; nevertheless she stood firm, though perhaps not entirely unaided by the fact that she was not in a position to do anything else.

"You must, of course, do as you please," she said with a coldness she did not quite feel. "I, as I have told you, have neither the power nor the inclination to pay you for silence, and I should not imagine Mr. Luttrell would either, seeing that he knows there is nothing to speak or to keep silence about in our short and somewhat disagreeable acquaintance. As for my husband, I doubt if you will make much profit out of him ; he is an astute man of business. I should advise you to be careful how you try to sell him a worthless piece of false information."

With that she rose as an intimation that the interview was at an end.

He rose too. "Well played !" he said, somewhat insolently. "That's good bluff, though hardly business. I won't detain you. Just let me give you my address ; it will find me till midday to-morrow. I shall be in your part of the world till then, so you can send for me when you change your mind."

But she did not change her mind. By midday to-morrow he had heard nothing of her, and so once more set out for the Waterside. He was going to look for Luttrell, but mindful of Mrs. Wythe's warning concerning the man, he had thought out a delicate and generous manner of approach, not likely to have unpleasant results.



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Unfortunately for him, it had no results at all, for Luttrell had left the Waterside before he got there, and no one could say where he had gone.



CHAPTER XII

SIR WILLIAM GOYTE was travelling to Curayl ; it was nearly a fortnight since Delmer had been to the old house, some considerable while since Beatrice first returned there. During all that time Goyte had neither written nor made any sign ; to-day he had not let his wife know of his intended visit. He knew pretty well when she came back from the Waterside—he had taken care to be informed of that ; but he had purposely left her alone that he might reduce her to a proper state of mind by anxiety for her future and a sense of his anger. Now he judged she had been left long enough for reflection ; also he had yesterday received an anonymous letter which made him decide things had gone far enough. The letter told little, though it hinted a great deal ; the writer was too clever to give such information that the recipient could by it hunt up the evidence for himself. This, however, was the last thing Sir William would have thought of doing, for he did not believe a word of the charge, he was too successful a man to take much notice of anonymous letter writers ; also it was impossible to associate the thing hinted with the Beatrice of his knowledge, her shortcomings lay in quite other directions. Still it was the letter which decided him to end the present state of



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things, for it convinced him their strained relations were becoming known, and that and all similar scandal he did not intend to have. Accordingly, one gray afternoon, when he could very ill spare the time, he came to Curayl to settle matters once for all.

Unfortunately for him Beatrice had not been spending her solitude in quite the reflections he imagined; she had not given a single thought to his anger or the reason of his silence. Her own silence had been quite as unbroken; she had not written to him because she had not the least anxiety to hear from him; she was quite ready to stop at Curayl an indefinite time. She needed no ready money there, and in all respects it suited her better than anything else. She was physically very tired with her recent work and mentally much more tired still. So she stayed passive, thinking her own thoughts and sometimes vaguely forming plans, but no idea of return or reconciliation was among them. It is true she had once been convinced that nothing less was her duty. Luttrell had convinced her; but since then he had been proved to be altogether a lie, and now of his specious reasoning she would believe nothing and at his bidding do nothing. He was a liar, and a hypocrite, beguiling all, even her, with his silver tongue; false in deed, and so doubtless false in word, ready to betray the confidence reposed in him. It is to be feared she forgot to ask herself whether the thing he had advised was right; probably she would not have seen it so if she had; principally she was occupied in remembering that he had advised it, and he was a lie.

Of this unpropitious state of affairs Sir William naturally knew nothing. In confident assurance



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he came to the great house of Curayl, and found it, by reason of its shut-up state, even less to his taste than usual. Beatrice was sitting by the fire in the small drawing room; there was a little table before her scattered over with her embroidery. She looked up from her work when he entered, but showed neither surprise nor relief at the sight of him, receiving him with her usual politeness, the which annoyed him unreasonably just then, as it seemed to him to indicate that she did not think him good enough to conciliate or quarrel with.

"So you've got tired of your sick nursing," he remarked, as he took the chair opposite to her.

"There was no more to be done," she answered.

"The epidemic was practically over."

"Oh, your good work was finished, then? Having had your amusement, satisfied your conscience, you call it, but it comes to the same thing; some people satisfy their consciences and some their appetites, it's all one so long as they are satisfied—having had your amusement and done as you pleased, I suppose you feel very virtuous and quite ready to come home and allow me the privilege of paying your bills."

Beatrice was not ready for any such thing, but she did not say so at once, she began to fold her work together. "I am glad you have come down to-day," she said, "we can talk things over, and come to some sort of an understanding."

"We certainly shall," Goyte returned. "You will have to understand that there will be no more of this sort of thing. There'll be no more running off on any jaunt that your fancy—or—conscience—dictates. You're my wife, and you'll have to stop in my house and act as such."

"I think," Beatrice answered, "the thing for us

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to understand at the outset is that I had better not occupy your house or act as your wife."

Sir William stared in blank astonishment. "What!" he said, and for a moment could find no more words. Before he had recovered Beatrice went on to explain herself quietly. She had finished folding the embroidery now, and pushed the table on one side, as if to better give attention to the matter in hand.

"We are eminently unsuited to one another." So she concluded when she thought she had made the case quite clear. "Our married life has been a failure, not publicly—we have managed to keep it out of sight—still a failure for all that, and we may as well end it. I have disappointed you and not been what you expected, and for my own part the marriage has not been what I expected either; it would surely be better to admit it and separate."

For a moment Goyte still stared at her, and then the thought of the letter flashed into his mind, but he put it from him as absurd. Rather here was proof of its falsity, for if it had a shadow of truth Beatrice would not venture on this daring proposal, she would have attempted to conciliate and conceal.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "A legal separation and an allowance, is that the idea? By Jingo, it doesn't want for impudence." And feeling more than ever sure of her he laughed the taunting laugh that stung and roused every drop of fighting blood in her.

"Look here," he said, not waiting for any reply, "I married you for a purpose—I own I had some foolish notions that I admired you and your spirit when I did it, but that was not the chief reason. I wanted you to head my table, manage my house-

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hold, take a place in society and look nice the while. That was my reason for marrying you, and as you can still do it I don't feel inclined to pay you not to. From my point of view, you see, the marriage is not quite a failure, though I have ceased to admire you and your spirit on closer acquaintance. A separation won't meet with my views. I want an understanding, an understanding that you can't in future do quite all you like. A separation may suit you but it won't me. I'm not going to make you an allowance to live where you're no good to me—I have no notion of paying for what I don't get."

Beatrice bit her lip. "You would naturally not pay for what you did not have," she said haughtily. And he cut in—"You may be quite sure of that, my dear."

"So in future," she went on without heeding the interruption, "you had better reckon your annual expenditure to be less by the amount you have been in the habit of spending on me."

"What do you mean?" he asked, the smile of the man with the whip dying out of his face.

"That I am not coming back."

"Don't be a fool," he said sharply; "you know you must come if I say you must; I can compel you; and, by Jupiter, I will if I have any nonsense."

"It would hardly serve your purpose to do that," she reminded him. "I should not be much use to you socially after a scandal, and not of much value as a table ornament if I was obviously there against my will."

There was some truth in this but he did not admit it. "It would be of great use to me to bring you to your senses," he said; "and I'll do it even if I have to resort to the law."

He had risen to his feet and stood before the

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fire. "What is the meaning of this sudden whim?" he asked. "What has put it into your head? Is it because I would not subscribe to your beastly paupers, or because I told you to come away from their dens?"

"The position is altogether untenable," she answered. "There are a dozen reasons. I will explain if you like—the Waterside people have not a great deal to do with it, though I dare say they helped."

"Oh, they did, did they?" he said cheerfully. "Now we begin to understand one another. In the plebeian language that I talk, you want money just like every one else, a regular settlement, so much a year for life——"

"No, I do not! If you settled £5,000 a year on me it would make no difference."

"That's lucky, because I'm not going to do it."

He was delighted to have roused her to some display of feeling, and he strolled to the window and looked out, a smile hovering round his lips. He did not believe her last disclaimer; he fancied he now had the reason of her revolt and so the key to the situation. He did not mean to bribe her back, though, if he could help it; it would be a confession of weakness which would place her at an advantage for always, but it was well to know this vulnerable point.

"How do you propose to live if you do not come back?" he asked over his shoulder.

"I suppose I am as well or as ill fitted to get my own living as most women," she answered.

"Work for it?" he said contemptuously. "You couldn't work. Don't run away with that idea. You don't even know what it is; none of your people have done an honest day's work for five generations."



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That's why I married you, because you can't work and don't look as if you could, and because there's no mistaking what you are ; any fool can see at a glance that you're pure bred, a luxury that only a rich man could afford to keep."

The blood came faintly to Beatrice's cheeks, and she remembered her old thought of the Circassian slave—bought, and only a rich man could pay her price!—shown to exhibit her purchaser's wealth ! She could not trust herself to speak, she was too ashamed.

But Goyte did not heed. "What do you think you can do?" he asked. "Take up type-writing? You might as well think of selling flowers in the street. You'd be better trying that, you might pick up with a man that way——"

Beatrice cut him short. "I could live on very little," she said.

That was true and he knew it. "I suppose you think you'll sell what's left of your property," he said; "keep your precious house, I suppose, but sell the rest and starve on the proceeds of the sale. But if you're thinking of that you're making a mistake. Nobody would buy."

"Perhaps not for a high price," Beatrice said, "they might for a little."

"And you would sacrifice your beloved property for a little?" he sneered.

"If I were compelled."

"I'll tell you what will happen if 'you are compelled,'" he said, drawing nearer—"I shall buy the land you sell and I'll build a brewery on it, or an asylum,—it's a nice quiet place for that,—or else run up workmen's houses. Oh, I dare say I shall drop money over it but I can afford that. I'd cut the place to pieces if I bought it, and I should buy

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it. Not of you, certainly not, of the man who bought it."

It was a thing he could do, would take some delight in doing, Beatrice knew.

"Don't you believe me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"That's as well, because I shall do it,—unless you come back and behave reasonably."

She did not answer but sat still, seeing in her mind the desolation his words called up. She saw it and felt sick, but it did not shake her purpose. There was no one to come after her at Curayl, no other to suffer for the desolation. Had Goyte united with her to rebuild the fortunes of the family, had there been a child even of this union to come after, he might have touched her to the quick. But there was no one to whom it mattered: the Curayls were dead and gone; the very tradition of family pride for which she had lived and sacrificed was but a dead superstition, the husk of a belief which had lingered after the soul which gave it life was fled.

"You had better pack your things and come back with me to-night."

Her husband's voice broke in on her. She lifted her head and in her eyes was the pain and awe of one who has looked upon the dead. "I am not coming," she said.

For a moment he was nonplussed; this obstinacy was beyond belief. He had spoken with the scornful assurance of one who has gained the day, a flavour of the man with the whip again. He did not believe she would stand out against his last threat; he was astonished by this refusal and proportionately angered. In his annoyance he swore and told her the sort of fool he thought her.

She showed no emotion and no sign of yielding.



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He walked the length of the room ; he walked it again ; he trod heavily, for he was very angry and with an increasing anger. He was gradually realizing that he might have to make terms instead of dictating them, for he was still convinced of her integrity, more than ever convinced of the falsity of the anonymous writer ; the obstinacy of her refusal argued for her innocency as no pleadings or asseverations could have done. Still he was bitterly angry ; even to the last he had counted on an easy victory and he was not a good loser ; but there seemed no help for it, he had got to give something. He came over to her.

"How much do you want ?" he demanded savagely, standing the other side of the little table.

She looked up in surprise. "How much ?" she repeated.

"Yes, how much ?" he said more loudly. "There's no need to beat about the bush and play at ignorance, you won't get a halfpenny more for that, so you may as well say in plain figures how much you want. That's what it comes to. What do you want for being Lady Goyte ?"

"I don't want anything. I have told you so before."

Goyte had sat down and taken out a notebook as if he were prepared to write down some sort of an agreement ; now he tapped the table impatiently with the book. In his opinion either she was coquetting with conquest, perhaps with the erroneous idea of enhancing her value, or else more probably she was trying to decide how much she should ask.

But when she still persisted in her refusal he was at a loss, against his will forced to believe she meant it, and to look for another motive for her actions. There was only one powerful enough in his opinion,

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and involuntarily his hand sought the pocket where he had the letter. What if after all he had been wrong in his judgment of her, and she, with a wit and daring he had never expected, had played this bold game to throw him off the scent? He leaned across the table, and though there was anger in his eyes there was also something of triumph in having found her out.

"There's a man at the bottom of this!" he cried with his face close to hers.

She drew back, indignation obliterating every other feeling, even a recollection of Delmer and his insinuations. "How dare you!" she said.

"How dare I what? Which is the insult, that I should come within kissing distance or suggest the existence of a lover to any one so superior? You have always been a very immaculate person I know, quite above and not like any one else. It is not like any one else to try for a separation under the circumstances, there is a bare-faced impudence about the proceeding which is worthy of—well, of a Curayl."

Beatrice rose. "You know," she said with the disdainful quiet of extreme anger, "that what you say is false."

"I don't know anything of the kind."

"Then I will not attempt to convince you," and she moved towards the door.

But before she reached it he sprang up. "No, you don't!" he said, taking her by the wrist. "You don't go off in tragic silence. We'll have an explanation of this here and now, afterwards you will come back to town with me. As for your paramour, I'll see him next time he calls. Do you hear me?" he asked as she made no reply, and he shook the arm he held.

"I hear," she answered, standing proud and



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passive in his grip, "but I shall not go with you ; nothing you could do would induce me to go with you now."

"We'll see about that," he said, then he shifted his grip and turned her so that their eyes must meet. "Now !" he said—"first the name of the man. Out with it ! You've got to tell, and the sooner you do it the better for you. The name of the man who has been making love to you."

"There is only one person who has mentioned such a thing to me," she answered ; "that is my husband."

She faced him, unveiled contempt in her looks. But even as she spoke there rose up before the eyes of her mind the figure which had crossed her line of vision that sunny afternoon when Goyte came to the Waterside. She saw it quite plainly, saw the thin face and the keen light eyes that were neither blue nor green. Saw it as she had seen it on a morning in the cool clear light of dawn, when a voice that thrilled with a thousand unspoken invitations asked her to come forth.

She moved. How could she not move when that vision came between her and her husband scarcely a hand's breadth away ? But the face moved too. She saw the man now as she had seen him first in the twilight of the old church ; when he looked straight to her soul and told her truths that she had hidden from herself—when he stood in the time-blackened pulpit in another man's robes, another man's place and played the hypocrite ! He had played the hypocrite, ah, that was true, he had played the hypocrite ! But had he not also played the man ?

Goyte dropped her hands baffled, for the vision-filled eyes had told nothing to him. "I don't



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believe you," he said with his hand once more on the letter.

She sat down by the fire shivering a little. When she answered him a moment back she had said what was true, just as when she had answered Delmer nearly two weeks ago. But that moment—a time that could not be really measured—had revealed something. The words were literally true still, but in spirit was the one's charge altogether groundless, and the other's suspicion entirely without foundation? She put the thought from her in anger and shame, and drew close to the fire, shivering again.

Goyte was behind her now, for he had walked to the window and stood once more looking out at the dusk, still fingering the letter.

"Look here," he said at last, "you may just as well speak out. I know there is some one behind this, and other people know it too."

So Delmer had applied to him! How much had he said and how much only hinted? Beatrice moved a little in her chair and spoke with a composure she did not feel. "Under the circumstances," she said, "you would do better to apply to the other persons, for I have nothing to tell you."

Goyte did not believe it, still he did not know what to believe. The letter had not been explicit, very far from it; he wished he had followed it up and learned more before he came here. And yet these anonymous slanderers were usually liars, and also, judging by what he knew of her, Beatrice should be too honest as well as hardly clever enough for such large scale deception. But what then was her motive? He did not know what to think. He tried to find some act or word in the past on which he might hang suspicion.

"What's become of that portrait you had?" he

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asked. "You know the thing I mean, a painting on ivory, a handsome man, a deal handsomer than me, and younger too. Even you could not pretend it was meant for me. Fetch it, I want to have a look at it."

So he spoke peremptorily; but Beatrice laughed, a little hysterically perhaps, but the portrait—she remembered very clearly its faultless classic face with refined yet heartless sensuality latent in it—was so widely unlike the vision that had risen up before her. Certainly the informer had done his work badly to leave Sir William to wander thus!

"Did you happen to look at the back of the portrait?" she asked. "I thought not; it's a pity you did not examine it thoroughly. If you had looked you would have discovered a slip of paper at the back, and under it another miniature set back to back with the first. The second represented a woman whose collar and headdress might have given you some clue to the date of the painting. The man's portrait did not; he was vain of his beautiful throat, and chose to be painted as if he were a Greek god—he was said to have possessed that sort of beauty. I need hardly tell you that the originals of both portraits are dead."

Goyte bit his lip; the sarcasm of her tone stung him, and the fact that it was possibly justified did not tend to make it pleasanter. "Where is the thing?" he demanded savagely. "Show it to me."

"I cannot do that, I have not got it."

He burst out laughing. "You hardly expect me to believe that," he said.

"You can of course do as you please," she answered indifferently.

"Then I please not to believe it. I suppose you'll tell me next that your father gave it to you, that the stones are paste, and the whole thing worth ten



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shillings. But I know better than that. There are some good sized rubies set in the gold band that holds the miniature, and the diamonds that make the circle outside are very decent brilliants. It is worth a lot more than anything else you have which I didn't give you. There's none of your people, no one who has any right to do it, who could afford to give you such a thing. The question is who did give it to you?"

"My mother."

"Rot! You haven't got anything of your mother's that's worth having, the Major saw to that. It isn't very likely that he would have overlooked those brilliants."

She did not contradict him; and he, feeling convinced that he was now on the right track, said—"Where is that portrait? Fetch it, I want to have a look at that Greek god! Perhaps you can produce him, even if you cannot produce the lady at the back."

"I can produce neither, for I have neither."

"What have you done with them?"

"That I am afraid I cannot tell you."

The folly of such an answer might have struck Goyte, but it did not for he was very angry. He said a good deal and perhaps he said it rather coarsely; but a man in a rage is always at a disadvantage with a woman who is icily silent. He realized it, and becoming cooler ceased threatening and began to crossquestion her, though to no purpose. At last he advised her sharply to speak out. "You fool," he said, "don't you see the imbecility of what you're doing? I can find out to-morrow all I want to know and more besides. I am only giving you this last chance to clear yourself."

"Generous," she answered coldly, "but scarcely



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necessary. It is a matter of indifference to me whether or not I am cleared."

Therein it seemed lay the strength of her position. He strode to the door. "You have got that portrait here," he said. "I am going to find it, and then I am going to town to find the man."

"Here are my keys," she said, taking them from her work-basket.

He hesitated; if she offered them probably the thing was not there. While he hesitated the gardener's wife came to announce the return of the fly which had brought him from the station and was to take him back again. He looked at his watch; there was not too much time for the train, and business made it imperative that he should be back in London that evening; after all, there was an equal if not greater chance that the miniature was among Beatrice's things in town; he could search for it as well there as here, and search for the original much better.

He put his watch away. "I'm going," he said. "No, I'm not going to take you by force; I'm not so anxious for the pleasure of your company as to make a scene to get it. Besides, I've got some work to do. I shall be in the city to-morrow, and so not able to look after you. You are better here for the present. You can't get into much mischief, and if you attempt to run away I can easily have you followed."

She took some keys off the bunch she had offered him before. "These belong to my secretaire and wardrobe in town," she said. "I presume you will want them."

Then suddenly he lost all self control. He snatched them from her hand. "For two straws I'd thrash you," he said, while all the brute in his nature leaped up in his face.

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For an instant her face changed too; her lips curled up so that her teeth showed gleaming and her eyes kindled like two points of fire. But in a moment she had recovered herself, and taking another key from the bunch handed it to him.

"You will want that too," she said. "It belongs to the small inlaid cabinet in my dressing-room."

His fingers closed convulsively on it, and for half a second his breath seemed to choke him, then—"Damn you!" he cried. "Damn you, you white-faced harlot!" and he flung it in her face.

It fell to the floor. She neither moved nor spoke, but stood rigid like one made of stone. The key lay at his feet; he kicked it so that it struck ringing on the fender. Then he strode across the room, and almost without turning the handle jerked the door open and went out, banging it after him.

CHAPTER XIII

“**L**ET not the sun go down upon your wrath,” said the wise Apostle Paul long ago. The saying often afterwards occurred to Beatrice, but on the one day of her life that stood plainest for wrath it did not come. Had it done so it would have had no meaning ; there was no going down of the sun for her, no ending of the day ; night and day were all one, a black unbroken stretch. There was no sleep to fill the dark hours, no thought free to take knowledge of the coming of the morrow’s light ; in her mind there was but one thing, one idea, it dominated all others and filled the hours completely till almost twenty-four were passed.

But by the time afternoon had come again a change had begun to creep over her ; it was as if the muscles of her mind began to relax a little. A sickening weariness, almost a fear of her own thoughts took possession of her and drove her out, like those possessed of old, as if by physical flight, to escape the legion within.

She went out into the gardens but soon was beyond their limits ; the narrow paths and deep alleys were too close and confined for her. She must have space, space to move quickly, to move freely, to be alone, away even from the familiar

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trees and walks that she loved. So she made her way beyond her own gates to the wide fields where the river ran between pollard willows, and the deep dykes and water courses that drained the land reflected only the pale sky above. Very still it was out here ; a still silver day, no sun but the sky low and pale shining, the distance all dim with mist and the waterways like silver mirrors full of sleeping light. Everywhere there was great peace, but to her there was no peace. She walked by the slow moving stream fast and yet faster and felt no weariness. To one who could have seen within it was as if some living soul from the pit paced the white fields of death and found no rest.

Once only did another figure cross her line of vision, Helen Ranger going by a footpath to some distant cottages. She did not recognize her, her mind was a long way from the gentle girl who coloured to find herself forgotten. But after she had passed Beatrice remembered her, and with her the time and incidents of their meeting, when Luttrell had come down to the marsh cottage—Luttrell, who was a hypocrite, a liar and a deceiver !

For some reason this seeing Helen Ranger broke the circle in which Beatrice's mind had been going for twenty-four hours, at least for a little while. She went home thinking of other things, yet they eventually brought her back to her starting-point, for was it not Luttrell who had urged her to go back to her husband and make peace, even on the same night when he had declared himself a deceiver ? She began to go over what he said then ; she could almost hear him state his arguments. She did not accept them, yet they were terribly valid ; justice and right were not all on her side before yesterday, and since—she had worked round to the original

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theme once more. She heard again her husband's taunting laugh, she felt the grip of his hand on her wrists, the sting of the key on her face, and all the blood of a haughty unchecked race rose up in outraged pride and bitter hatred.

She was back now in the room where yesterday she had seen him. She was standing by the fireplace, her hands, though she was not aware of it, tightly clenched, her eyes fixed on the blaze. The gardener's wife opened the door a little way. "Please'm," she said—no one in Curayl spoke of "my lady—" "there's somebody wants to see you."

Beatrice did not turn her head. "I cannot see any one this afternoon," she said.

The old woman hesitated. "It's a gentleman come down from London, I think'm," she volunteered. "He gave me a card," she held the slip from her so as to focus it for her weak sight. "Hazler's the name," she said.

The name seemed familiar to Beatrice; she remembered to have heard her husband mention it in some connection. Hazler—Hazler & Simpkins, they were a firm who did something for him. She turned the card over and saw pencilled on the back the two names with "solicitors" written underneath. Had he then already been to his lawyers about her? He must have done so; there seemed no other explanation of this visit. She wondered if it were with a view to forcing her back or to threaten her with divorce proceedings. Either was possible, though, on the whole, it was more probable that this Mr. Hazler had come only semi-officially to see if he could patch things up between them. In any case it were perhaps wiser as well as more courteous to see him.

Mr. Hazler sat by the library table restlessly



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turning the leaves of a book he did not read. He knew little of Lady Goyte-Curayl; indeed, he knew practically nothing of Goyte's private affairs, even professionally. It was Simpkins, his partner, who dealt principally with Sir William's business. He had come to Curayl to-day scarcely in a professional capacity, and on a task that Simpkins flatly declined to undertake. It was a self-imposed task for either of them, yet it seemed to him it should be done, for this little he had learned of Lady Goyte-Curayl, she was young and she was alone. So he put other matters aside and came; and now, a little after four o'clock, he had reached Curayl, the great grey house that stood lonely in the falling twilight, and sat waiting its mistress in the dim library.

There was a step outside; it was a quiet step, but it sounded loudly in that echoing house. Lady Goyte-Curayl came in. She received him with distant graciousness; her manner was not encouraging, but he was a man of wide experience, and it only set him wondering what she feared or suspected of his visit.

"I cannot pretend that I have come on a happy errand," he said, seating himself opposite her. "I am a bringer of bad news."

"Yes?" She was evidently not surprised or startled, as was to have been expected. She glanced round to see if he had any papers with him. He had not, unless they were in his pocket; still she said, "You will like a light."

He moved towards the bell, but—"I am afraid it is no use ringing," she said, "I have not many servants here."

She raised the lamp globe as she spoke, but he stopped her.

"Perhaps there is no need for a light," he sug-

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gested gently. "I have no papers to refer to. My news is not of that kind."

She turned surprised eyes upon him. It was still light enough for him to see her plainly: the room faced west, and those silver days die slowly with long haunting twilights.

"It is about your husband," he went on. "He has—has met with an accident."

"Yes?" she said quite calmly. Of course the news was about Goyte; she knew that, though what accident he could have had, or what that had to do with it, she could not think.

"A very bad accident," the lawyer continued, wishing she would flinch or look away. "He is—I am afraid there is little hope. There is"—it was useless to dally with the truth, false kindness to delay, the news must be given—"there is no hope of his recovery."

She looked at him in blank amazement, even, he could see, in plain incredulity; but she said never a word, so unaided he had to go on with his difficult task.

"It is only cruel to give you groundless hope," he said. "Your husband cannot recover. No, he is—he is already dead."

"Dead?" she repeated. "No, he can't be dead. He is not really dead."

She spoke quite calmly, only rather low, in a curious soft voice that roused Hazler's compassion more than any tears or despair.

"My dear lady," he said very gently, "believe me, there is no room for doubt. I would have spared you if I could. I have seen him myself, and you must believe me that he is indeed dead."

"Dead!" she repeated again, but aloud and with a growing conviction. "Dead—he is dead!"

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She shivered a little, and it seemed to the lawyer that her eyes grew dark with the fear of one who repents and is afraid.

He rose and walked to the window. Whatever emotions possessed her he had neither the right nor the wish to witness them. For a little he stood there saying nothing ; at last he spoke again. "Death was almost instantaneous ; it was a street accident—he was practically killed in the street."

"When did it happen ?" she asked.

"This morning. He had been to see my partner, Mr. Simpkins, on business."

"Concerning what ?"

The question struck him as somewhat curious, especially as it was spoken with a veiled eagerness that did not escape him. "It was about some commercial transactions," he said. "I have not the particulars. Mr. Simpkins received Sir William's instructions, but it was in connection with some land he thought of purchasing when it was put on the market."

She nodded, and he went on. "Sir William was going on elsewhere, and kept a hansom waiting during his interview with my partner. I do not know how the accident happened—it must have been almost immediately after he had driven from our office. Some of the bystanders said the horse took fright and bolted, others that it slipped ; anyhow it fell and the cab was overturned. It was a bad upset ; the horse was much frightened and hurt : it was some minutes before anything could be done."

"And my husband was thrown out ?"

"And kicked. I do not think he suffered. He was quite unconscious when he was picked up, and never recovered. Of course medical help was



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instantly procured, but nothing could be done ; life was quite extinct in an hour."

Beatrice nodded slowly, and there was a long pause. The gloom was deepening fast now, it was impossible to see anything plainly. At last she roused herself. "It was good of you to come down here to tell me," she said.

"I went to your house in town," the lawyer answered, "and finding that you were not there, I came on here. It seemed better than telegraphing to you in the circumstances."

"Thank you," she said simply ; "thank you very much."

After that something was said about funeral arrangements. Mr. Hazler asked if she wished her husband's body brought to the little village where her own people all lay.

"No," she said quickly. "No, not that ; bury him ——" for a moment she could think of no cemetery, and she could not well say, "bury him anywhere." There was a hardly perceptible pause, at least it was hardly perceptible to Mr. Hazler, though to Beatrice it seemed long before her lagging memory supplied a name. When it did, it was not the most suitable, but it did not matter, no one would ask her the reason of her choice.

Mr. Hazler noted the name and said it should be arranged as she desired. Then he suggested that she would wish to return to town immediately. It was of course impossible for the new-made widow to be left alone in the great grey house. He had been able to hear of no relative for whom to send, and it seemed that here she had no companion or attendant except the old woman who had opened the door. "You will perhaps allow me to take you to London this evening," he said.



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But Beatrice, though she thanked him, refused. "I will come to-morrow," she said, "to-night I must stay here."

He looked a little surprised, but she only repeated, "I must stay here; to-morrow I will come and do everything. Let me stay here to-night."

She gave no reason, and he did not ask, but acceded to her request and urged the point no further. It was only conventionality that insisted on her need of support, demanding that she should at once go to the darkened town house and begin to be the rich man's widow. Mr. Hazler in his professional capacity had seen much that conventionality did not recognize, and he was too wise to urge unnecessary claims now. To-morrow Lady Goyte-Curayl would come to town and do all that she ought; to-night the woman, the living passionate woman that lay hid in the coldly stately shell, might well have to herself. For what? It was not his concern. She might sorrow for the man she had not loved, she might grieve for some wrong done, or thought, or spoken, that could not now be undone, or she might sit all night face to face with some naked truth. It was not for him to judge her, and he was glad of it. And all through the tedious journey back to town he carried in his mind the memory of the proud pale face, and the old grey echoing house in the silence, and the lonely dark.

Beatrice returned to town and took her part in the solemn bustle of funeral preparation. Letters of formal condolence, cards of less intimate sympathy, mourning apparel, the stately funeral itself—she did what was expected of her in connection with each, though more than once she found herself

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comparing them with the simplicity attendant on the last death rites with which she had been concerned. At the Waterside nobody condoled ; the relations, if they felt it, wept aloud or frankly owned it was a happy release (possibly for the survivors). Friends were equally outspoken. Their sympathy was plainly put, whether it was with the regret or the relief ; and the poor body, as soon as might be, and with no panoply at all, was carried out on the quiet marshland, there to be burned in the eye of open heaven, while Luttrell, pagan and deceiver perhaps, but for all that one who felt for and with his people, said what "comfortable things" he could from the burial service and elsewhere.

Beatrice recalled all this on the day of her husband's funeral, and thought of it again as she stood in her dressing-room before the little inlaid cabinet. A seal had been put upon it the day her husband died ; it was set just over the broken lock. There was a splinter of wood that stood out—the lock had been roughly forced ; he had done it on the night when he returned from Curayl. The key was at Curayl still, lying on the floor where he had left it, unless the gardener's wife had found it and put it elsewhere. And he, too angry to take the key, too suspicious to believe in its offer, had broken the lock near midnight. And before the next midnight the careful hands of his solicitors had sealed up the little cabinet. He was dead, and she—she had hated him with a terrible hatred for four and twenty hours, and then they came to tell her he was dead. She shivered and looked at her hands as if she thought to see some stain upon them.

Soon after Mr. Hazler came to talk over Sir William's affairs with her. They were not, he said, left in an altogether satisfactory state.



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"I do not mean," he explained, "they are in an embarrassed condition, far from it. Sir William was a very rich man—quite as rich, I should say, as even report made him; but he died intestate, having made no disposal whatever of his property. Sir William, of course, was still a comparatively young man; the advisability of making arrangements for the future would not seem to him of immediate importance."

"No," Beatrice said, "he would not have thought to have died for a long time."

"It is unfortunate," the lawyer went on, "that he left no instructions as to the way in which he wished to provide for you, but even under the present circumstances, you will still find yourself a wealthy woman."

"I?" Beatrice asked quickly.

"Yes," Mr. Hazler answered; "you will take something over one half of all the personal estate. The real estate, fortunately, is inconsiderable; had it formed the bulk of the property you would have been much less well off. As it is, the division is not altogether unsatisfactory, especially as Sir William's relatives do not appear to have any particular claim upon him."

The lawyer spoke in a pleasantly professional manner, but there was something strained in Beatrice's way of receiving the news. "Do you mean," she asked, "that half of all the money comes to me? Is that what the law decides? Then it must decide something different. I cannot touch it; it is not what he intended."

Mr. Hazler looked surprised. "My dear lady," he remonstrated, "we are hardly in a position to say what Sir William intended; no doubt you are the one best able to judge, but even you cannot be

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quite sure, and in any case the law does not recognize unrecorded intentions."

"His intention was that I should have nothing," Beatrice said. "Had he lived a few months longer he would probably have made that clear, if not by a will, then in some other way."

"He gave no hint of any such intention," the lawyer objected. "He was, you may remember, in consultation with my partner a very short time before his death: he gave absolutely no indication of such an idea."

"Nevertheless it was in his mind."

"Then," Mr. Hazler said, "I can only say I am glad he did not express it that morning. Doubtless, had he made any such hasty arrangement, he would have reconsidered it in a few months. Seeing that his death occurred so soon after that interview we can but be glad he did not then do anything that he himself would have been the first to regret after consideration."

But Beatrice thought otherwise; moreover, to her, the intention and the act seemed to be one. "It need make no difference," she said, "whether he only intended it or actually did it. Had he lived I should have had nothing; I wish to have nothing still; I do not wish to profit by his death."

This was absurd. Mr. Hazler felt it to be so, but he also felt at a disadvantage, for he was in a measure bound to keep to the surface of things. It was quite obvious that there was something behind, probably some serious disagreement between the dead man and his wife, but she was careful not to mention it.

He argued and expostulated. "If," said he at last, "Sir William did not intend the money for you, for whom did he intend it?"



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"I don't know."

"Then why, seeing we are ignorant of his wishes, should not you have it as well as another?"

"I am not ignorant of his wishes, or at least the only one that matters. He did not mean me to have anything; I have the best of reasons for knowing it."

So the lawyer guessed, but it did not seem much good inquiring into them. After a little he asked, "Under your marriage settlement to what are you entitled?"

"There was no settlement."

"None?" He was a good deal surprised. "You have nothing from Sir William?"

"And I wish for nothing."

"Pardon the question, but how are you circumstanced otherwise?"

"I have Curayl—a house that is, and a certain amount of land."

"The house to which I came the other day?" Mr. Hazler asked. "The land I suppose is near"—he stopped a moment, remembering something. "Did not Sir William think of buying some land in that neighbourhood? I believe when he saw Mr. Simpkins he mentioned his intention to purchase as soon as there was any to be had."

Beatrice knew it and knew the reason; but the lawyer, who did not, suggested, "He perhaps wished to make your estate complete?"

"I think not."

"You do not in any case wish to carry on his schemes? If you are advised by me you will not attempt to; it is an unwise as well as a difficult thing to carry out another person's unexpressed wishes."

"In this case there is no need, the land is already mine."

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The lawyer looked up sharply ; things must have gone far between these two, farther than he had first thought. He did not know what to say, so he wisely said nothing, but began to fold the papers he had not used ; he had brought them for reference as to the details of the estate, and the details had come in for no mention.

" I hope I have made myself quite clear," he said at last.

" Quite, thank you," she answered. " I hope, too, that I have made myself clear. Nothing that belonged to Sir William Goyte do I wish to have."

He tapped the table impatiently. " My dear lady," he said, " you cannot help yourself. It is no question whether you will have it or will not, it already is yours. If you were Sir William's legal wife, then that proportion of his estate that I have mentioned is yours until you die or dispose of it. What do you suppose can become of it if you do not have it ? "

Beatrice neither knew nor cared. " I suppose whoever has the rest will have it," she said.

" Not unless you give it to him, or rather them. You can give it to them or you can give it to the home for lost cats or anything else you like, but it is yours to dispose of."

This view of the case did not seem to have occurred to Beatrice before. He saw that and determined to leave her to consider it.

" I hope," he said rising, " that you will think the matter over ; there is no need to do anything hastily. No doubt when time has a little effaced recollections things will assume more just proportions and we shall arrive at some wise decision."

With that he went away, and Beatrice was left to think the matter over. But the only thought that



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came to her was one which would not be effaced. Not of Goyte, best or worst, taunting, furious, or generous ; not even of her own pain or wounded pride or mercilessly white anger, but of a voice that said, " We must not repudiate our bargains " ; " If a man has received the price named, even though it is inadequate, and fails to do what he has undertaken, how does he stand ? "

She had received the agreed price and she had failed of her part ; at the last she had failed, refusing absolutely to fulfil her share. She could not go back, she could not undo ; she could no more fulfil the unbeautiful marriage contract now than last week she could undo it. She could not even make restitution now, she could only refuse to benefit by the accident which had suddenly cut her free.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN the fever was at the Waterside Gainsford said it was not a really serious affair; at least, that its seriousness was a good deal exaggerated (by whom does not appear). But when the epidemic was over Gainsford plumed itself on the magnitude of the danger it had escaped and the success with which it had done so. This last was sometimes ascribed to the great coolness and common-sense displayed by every one in not running into infection or away from it. It is possible that some scoffers may say that the infection was rather distant to cause running away, and rather unpleasant, as well as out of the way, to induce much unnecessary running into. No one in Gainsford had any cause to go to the Waterside during that time unless they wished, and no one appeared to wish except Helen Ranger. She lived so far out of Gainsford that she had hardly counted, especially as she came back again before any one in the town knew she had gone and carefully abstained from saying much about it. Even to her father she said little, nothing at all about Luttrell's presence in the settlement; she had promised him she would not, and she kept her promise without a questioning thought as to his reasons.



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Mr. Ranger naturally took more interest in the progress of the fever than most people. It was he also who first felt that Gainsford owed something more than self-congratulations. It was his opinion that thanks at least were due to the man who had seen the Waterside through a bad time. Helen thought so too, only she knew there was more than one person to whom thanks were due. However one was enough for Gainsford. Beatrice Curayl did not receive expressions of gratitude public or private—no one felt in a position to thank her. As for Luttrell, he had gone, leaving no address, and owing to his own management and “the coolness and common-sense” of the people of Gainsford, his existence and share had at no time been known to many or realized even by the few. But Tollinger remained, and he it was who came in for the thanks, though he very nearly escaped.

It was, so Luttrell afterwards told the indignant doctor, entirely owing to his fatal weakness for the women that he came to receive the town’s expression of gratitude. He went to the Rangers’, that was how it happened ; he had no idea that any one had any idea of thanking him, indeed that there was anything calling for thanks, else certainly he would have kept away. He had written to Helen about some of the people at the Waterside who wanted help and some who had received it. Jenny had been placed by Luttrell in a training school, and Joe Heward had been found work, so his family were not in need ; but there were others who were—their names and requirements were given with businesslike precision. This communication had been meant for Beatrice, but Luttrell recommended Helen as the one best able to deal with the cases ; Helen, accordingly, received it.

Mr. Ranger, of course, heard of the letter ; indeed,

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helped materially to fulfil its behests. But he also took upon himself to answer it in his own formal style—a style modelled on the polite letter-writers of long ago. He said he must take the opportunity of again thanking the man who had given him back his beloved daughter; and that, while all the district owed Dr. Tollinger a debt of gratitude for his services, he himself had a great and private obligation that in warmth of feeling outweighed all others.

He also expressed himself anxious that the man to whom he owed so much should not leave the neighbourhood without spending one night beneath his roof.

The man in question grunted when he read the letter and hesitated before he accepted the invitation, but finally he did so—he could cut short Mr. Ranger's gratitude, he thought, and it would certainly be an opportunity to talk over sanitary matters. He might also mention another case to Helen—Helen really was a pleasant sensible sort of girl; he remembered thinking so when she came to the Water-side, unusually nice as women go. Accordingly, all unsuspecting, he accepted the invitation.

It was tea-time when he reached the Rangers' house. They always had a sit-up-to-the-table tea, with the lamp stood in the centre and a knife as well as a plate for everybody. There was buttered toast, and honey in an odd little pot like a blue china beehive. There were many other things—Mrs. Ranger had made a feast in his honour—but he noticed these in particular. The twilight was shut out by crimson curtains, and the fire burned so brightly that its reflection was quite dazzling in the tea-pot over which Helen presided. Helen was a sensible tea-maker, the doctor thought; her cups were large and deep, standing firm in their saucers; she seemed quite pre-



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pared to fill them four times at least, and the last tea was as good as the first.

During the meal Tollinger did not feel inclined to talk about sanitary matters, or give Mr. Ranger a lecture on the general conditions of the Waterside, there seemed so many other things to say and to hear. Helen took her share in the conversation ; she did not sit silent as on the night when Luttrell came. She found she was not afraid of Tollinger in spite of his short ways ; it was quite possible to disagree with him, it seemed, and not have your head bitten off—she even dared to argue with him once. Mr. Ranger was pleased with everything ; he beamed upon his guest. Tollinger unconsciously grew almost pleased with himself in this genial atmosphere.

Once Mrs. Ranger spoke of Luttrell, not as one who had worked at the Waterside but only as a stray preacher who had been there in the summer. She was not sure of his name : she called it first Luton and afterwards Littleton, and she and her husband questioned as to the date when he preached at Curayl. Tollinger did not set them right, though he looked across at Helen with a twinkle ; this was their secret, Luttrell's visit to the Waterside. Helen was busy with the tea-pot, so he did not catch her eye, but his own continued to twinkle as the old lady went on. "So unassuming he was," she said.

"A wonderful preacher," her husband added.

"Yet to see him here at this house," Mrs. Ranger said, "you'd never have thought it, so homely, no manners at all—No, I don't mean that ! You know what I mean, Dr. Tollinger. Of course we are not like professional people ourselves. My dear husband there has worked hard all his life ; he's never been to college, he's not like a professional man. We are quite plain people, and the clergy,

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of course, are not ; and sometimes when I've met a strange clergyman I've really felt quite fluttered ; they are often so dignified and priest-like now, not as they used to be when I was a girl. But Mr. Littleton wasn't a bit like that, he was so nice and chatty ; one could have told him anything, I mean about the children or the maids being troublesome, or the fruit not keeping or anything, just like a woman ! ”

Again Tollinger looked across at Helen, but this time he felt she was not in the secret ; she revered the man as the perfect priest, she thought of him as nothing else. He wondered how Luttrell had contrived to hold the daughter's spiritual gaze while he shared the mother's mundane trifles ; but in his heart he knew Luttrell had not “ contrived ” to do it ; he did it without contriving, it was unconscious, just an accident of his nature. Tollinger for a moment felt impatient with the nature. It was a clear waste that Helen Ranger should worship the spiritualized ideal of a priest, especially when the reality was neither spiritual, ideal, nor priest. He turned abruptly to Mr. Ranger with the intention of starting the sanitary question at once.

But the old gentleman was thinking of something else. “ A wonderful preacher,” he repeated half to himself. “ I remember his sermon well. It was about small sins, obstinacy particularly. I never thought it very wrong before—come to think of it, he didn't say it was either ; he only said you have to suffer for it and others have to suffer too, and that's true enough, true enough.”

The cheery face grew grave and sad at some recollection. Tollinger moved impatiently. This was a new view of the famous sermon which, it seemed, every one could interpret to his mind.

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"I've been trying to recall where he came from," Mr. Ranger said, rousing himself. "Things do slip my memory so now-a-days. But I remember all about it now. He came in place of Mr. Clifford, he who met with an accident—you remember, Helen. Poor fellow, it was a bad business—concussion of the brain. He hadn't really got over it when they moved him to London. He had lost his memory, they say; or, at all events, he couldn't recall anything that happened about the time of the accident."

Tollinger knew such a thing was possible. It seemed probable, too, since it would simplify matters for Luttrell. Fortune appeared always to favour him. After that they spoke no more of the preacher but talked of the doctor's own plans. He had been offered a post at a fever hospital; fever and beetles were the only things that really interested him, so he was pleased by the offer. The Rangers did not understand his enthusiasm for either; they hardly believed him when he said—"It was beetles that brought me to the Waterside and fever that kept me there—a student's interest in both cases."

Mrs. Ranger sighed sympathetically. "I suppose every doctor can't have a comfortable country practice," she said, "there wouldn't be enough for them all."

"But, mother dear," Helen said, "every doctor might not wish for that. There are some who would not choose it."

Mrs. Ranger was not altogether convinced. Tollinger did not think it worth while to try and convince her. He did think, however—and it was quite a new discovery to him—that Helen had very pretty eyes; she looked across at him with a smile; she understood his preference for fever work, and

it was quite by chance
to see his church
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round and said, "Mr.
Mr. Ranger?"

Mr. Ranger assented
Mr. Thwaites was no
Tollinger wondered
for, and why Mr. Thwa
he could get any inform
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rector opened the proc
He said it was quite in
was altogether informal
all Gainsford, in fact,
Tollinger pass through
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felt thanks for his single
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and suffering.



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this was horrible, an absolute breach of hospitality, and his face betrayed the thought. But no one heeded; the rector went on. He said a good deal, but it was all pretty much to the same effect, and the rest of the meeting said "Hear! hear!" at intervals. It seemed to be what it had chiefly come for.

Tollinger glared at the rector, but the good man did not even see it. He glared at Mr. Ranger, but he only smiled benignly. He was waiting his turn, when he would have the opportunity of saying a word of thanks too. The rest of the meeting was in like case; they had not merely come to say "Hear! hear!" that was a first and mistaken impression. Several of them had come to add their thanks on behalf of the "Oddfellows' Society" or the "Primrose League" or whatever local brotherhood they might represent. And Tollinger had to endure it—Tollinger, whose objection to thanks was more than usually marked, and who could not be said to adorn a pedestal gracefully. He looked at the door as if he meditated escape, but Mr. Ranger sat close up against it. At last he got to his feet, long before he was expected to.

But even though for a little he stopped the tide of eloquence he did little good. When he explained that he was not the person to be thanked, they did not believe him. He told them they owed something to Mrs. Curayl's devoted and disinterested nursing. She, unlike himself, had nothing in view but the people's good, so she deserved their thanks. Possibly they agreed with him, but seeing they were not in a position to thank her that did not matter. Chiefly, so he said, warming to his subject, the debt was due to a man who must be nameless; it was he who had kept the frightened and infected Waterside folk from contaminating Gainsford, and so had really

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served them ; it was he who had organized the whole campaign and reduced the seriousness of the epidemic, as well as done a large share of the actual work. It spoke well for Tollinger's loyalty that he left Luttrell nameless ; even, for fear of rousing suspicion, left him so shadowy that to the meeting he never was very real. In fact so unreal that to the doctor's intense annoyance they actually insisted that a good deal of the unnamed man's usefulness was a fiction of his modest and retiring disposition. At this his manners very nearly broke down ; he badly wanted to speak his mind, but he managed to control himself moderately, and in a little he hit on the expedient of talking about drains. It was useless to speak of Mrs. Curayl to these blockheads ; it seemed useless to talk of Luttrell, or even of his own interested motives (he declared his sole object in going to the Waterside was a scientific desire to watch the typhus at work)—so as a last resource he turned on the drains.

He thought, since he had to listen to what they said, they might just as well hear what he thought on one particular, even if they did not like it. The result was very satisfactory. One of those present was an architect and surveyor, and he thought he knew all about sanitation. The rector considered himself an authority on the housing of the poor problem, and Mr. Ranger's co-churchwarden had once been on a board of guardians. These were qualifications for giving an opinion on the condition of the Waterside, the question of reform and the cause of typhus fever. Soon all were busy airing their theories and defending them. Tollinger lost his temper with what he, to himself, called their crass stupidity, but he recovered his mental equilibrium and felt at home again ; and when the meeting broke up, later than had been



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anticipated, he had half convinced some of those present, if not to his theory of sanitation, at least to his opinion of his own and Luttrell's share of merit. Probably, as they said to one another on their homeward way, the lion's share of credit did belong to the other man; the doctor's opinions were so decided and (being opposed to theirs) so unsound, that he could hardly be a devoted benefactor of the poor or anything else very worthy of veneration.

Later on some people grew even more critical of Tollinger and his doings; that was when the burying of the typhus victims came to be discussed. Luttrell had foreseen there would sooner or later be an inquiry into that part of the proceedings; he was anxious to meet it whenever it should arrive, but Tollinger would hear of no such thing. As he pointed out, it would be difficult for Luttrell, owing to the part he had played, to face an inquiry; but since he was a rich man there was no reason why he should not pay any expenses that might arise out of the doctor's meeting it. Luttrell, rather reluctantly, consented to this, and when he was safely out of the way, and local authorities began to inquire into the manner in which the powers of the private person had been exceeded at the Waterside, Tollinger claimed the whole responsibility. With somewhat unnecessary greediness, he maintained that the idea was wholly his; he said it was a good idea, so good that he should certainly do exactly the same again if the occasion arose, and he said it very emphatically. When asked why he did not apply for permission, he answered that he hadn't thought of it, he had far too much to do at that time to apply to any one for anything; besides, his experience of applications was that they meant waiting, and bodies were things



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that could not wait. His manner was not conciliatory, and he took the opportunity of truculently stating his views on several matters, consequently the authorities were annoyed and some expense was incurred. But no one minded. Tollinger drew on Luttrell for the amount, and he thoroughly enjoyed saying what he thought, though of course he somewhat alienated public favour thereby. The Rangers, however, were not to be alienated by anything he might say or do : they remained loyal.

"I shall never forget that it was you who gave me back my little girl," Mr. Ranger said more than once.

And though Tollinger protested, "It was not I who did it," having now seen Helen at home he added, "But I would have done it if I could, for I know how I should feel about it if she were my own girl."

Which was rather a foolish remark, for Helen must have been three or four and twenty and he was not much more than forty, certainly not old enough to be her father. He thought this afterwards, and he thought it again next time he went to Gainsford. He began to go there pretty often about that time, in fact whenever he had a Sunday to spare, it somehow came about that he spent it at the Rangers' house.

CHAPTER XV

IN the meantime Luttrell was looking for the woman who should have received Caser's packet. He had not much to go upon, only the little he had been able to gather from Mrs. Wythe; but he used that little to the best of his ability and followed up likely women with the persistence possible to leisure and singularity. This search brought him in time to Mrs. Fisher.

Mrs. Fisher lived in Brighton. She had a good charing connection, which enabled her to support herself and her three children ever since the death of her late husband—and rather before it, the lamented Mr. Fisher being of a sickly and not too energetic sort. On the occasion when Luttrell went to see them the Fishers had been having sprats for tea—charing was at that time plentiful and sprats cheap. The Fishers occupied the ground floor of a house in a back street. The nature of their tea was patent to every one living in the house, and must have tried the noses of those less happily provided. It was a somewhat sour-looking young woman on her way from the floor directly above who set Luttrell in the way of finding the family.

"Mrs. Fisher!" she screamed, opening a door and letting out the last of the tempting odour, "some one to see you!"

Mrs. Fisher, who still wore the crape bonnet and

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sacking apron which is the uniform of her profession, looked round. "Come in, sir, come in. Alma, dust a chair for the gentleman. Not with your pinny! Lor' bless the child! it's all over fish."

Luttrell came in, and having assured the abashed Alma that the chair needed no dusting sat down.

"And what can I do for you, sir?" Mrs. Fisher inquired with the brisk cheerfulness which characterized her.

"Tell me, I hope," Luttrell answered, "that you were Mary Wythe before your husband persuaded you to be Mrs. George Fisher."

"Well, that's just what I can't do," Mrs. Fisher answered regretfully. "My name was Smith, Ethel Smith, and it was Alfred I married, not George. George ast me, but I wouldn't have him, and I don't regret it, though he is alive now and I buried my pore feller these eighteen months."

Luttrell was disappointed. Mrs. Alfred Fisher was not much use to him, but he made some suitable remarks, then inquired for George and his wife.

"They're gone to South Africa," Mrs. Fisher replied. "He thought he'd do better there. I hope he may for his poor wife's sake. I took a real likin' to her, I did; a nice quiet sensible little thing and industrious too; they were here months, he gettin' a job now and then and she doin' what she could at the dressmaking and plain sewin'."

"And her name?" Luttrell asked.

"Before she married? Mary Wythe. Was that the name you were askin' for? That's her fast enough. What do you want her for, if I may make bold to ask?"

"I'm not sure that I do want her," Luttrell answered. "That's just it; till I see her and have a talk with her I'm not sure she is the woman I

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want. Oh, I don't doubt she was Mary Wythe, if you say so; it isn't that. The question is, Is Mary Wythe the woman I want?"

"I'm sure I can't tell, sir." Mrs. Fisher said, as she possessed herself of the frying pan, which her youngest son was intent on licking.

After that it was some minutes before anything could be heard above the sufferer's protestations, but at last when Luttrell had quieted him with coppers, he said:—

"No doubt you got to know a good deal about Mrs. George Fisher while she was here. Perhaps you could tell me something?"

Mrs. Fisher was sure she could tell a good deal, and in answer to Luttrell's questions said yes, Mrs. George had a grandmother who lived—no, not at a place called Gainsford, but a good way from it, so to speak. This old woman was a thorough bad lot; she had heard about her not only from Mrs. George, who was a real Christian sort and never went out of the way to speak evil, but also from Fisher, who knew Gainsford. He had an aunt living there, a well-to-do woman with neither chick nor child of her own. She always said she was going to leave everything to Alfred and his boys, but it wasn't likely anything would come of that, poor Alfred being dead this many a long day. Brought back to the matter in hand Mrs. Fisher said Mrs. George had not seen much of her grandmother, in fact nothing at all of late years; they did not seem to have got on well together, which was a pity, but not surprising altogether, relatives not always getting on as you would expect. Mary had only once spent any length of time with the old woman, it seemed, and that must have been a good while ago, when she was quite a young girl.

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"She didn't talk a great deal about it to me," Mrs. Fisher said. "You see, it'd have been long before I knew her; but you arst me what you want to know, and I dare say I can tell you, if she told me."

"Did she ever speak of a man called Caser?" Luttrell asked.

"Caser?" Mrs. Fisher repeated. "Caser—let me think. Johnny, be quiet. Stop knockin' those knives about, can't yer? How'm I to think in that noise? Caser? I've got it—she did tell of him; he used to come and see her grandmother sometimes—a black man."

"Black?" Luttrell said.

"Not a nigger," Mrs. Fisher explained. "I don't mean that—jus' a dark man, I expect, no more black than many another. She didn't like him, that's why she called him black. Girls are that way, you know."

"Why did she not like him?"

"I don't know; he made her creep, she said, and he used to kiss her and so on."

Luttrell fancied he was at last coming nearer the information he wanted; he set to work to get more, and Mrs. Fisher, nothing loth, told him all she could, not forgetting to include the present whereabouts of her sister-in-law. It took time to do this, for the good woman found her own family history quite as interesting as Mrs. George's. She re-buried her husband and her mother for Luttrell's benefit, and saw her children through various serious illnesses for his sympathetic ear. But he did not mind, he had leisure and patience; and as he also learned enough about Mrs. George to convince him that she fulfilled the conditions he deemed necessary to Caser's woman wonderfully well, he did not feel



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that he had wasted time. At last he rose to go. Mrs. Fisher's fund of conversation was by no means exhausted, but it seemed there was nothing more of importance to hear, so he said he would not take up any more of her time, and having thanked her, said good-bye.

He did not return to London at once, but set out in the direction of those wide quiet squares and crescents that lie facing the sea on the east of the town. It was there, in a house dating from the latest days of the Regency, that Mrs. Crief was to be found at this time of the year. She spent most of the autumn and winter at Brighton; it was not fashionable, as she said, but then she was old enough not to have to trouble about fashion. That was one of the compensations for growing old, she maintained one could do as one liked: (some people said Mrs. Crief had always done that). Once upon a time she had been a beauty, or at least had the reputation for it. Now she was a little stout old woman, who owed nothing to nature and little to art. She wore whatever her dressmaker and milliner sent her, and they took care to send her whatever no one else would buy. But in spite of her appearance her society was appreciated by all who were privileged to share it; indeed a desire for it often brought busy people a long way to see her. Luttrell was never busy, and he did not come to Brighton on purpose to see Mrs. Crief, nevertheless he was of all men the most welcome. They were friends of long standing, connections in some distant way; it was to her he had written from the Waterside when on the first outbreak of fever he thought it wiser to let some one know his whereabouts.

The old lady was reading when he came up to

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the large pale drawing-room. She looked up as he entered, and her sharp eyes brightened, though she only said—

"Oh, then, you are not dead?"

Luttrell smiled: "Not yet," he answered, "although I have been banished from your presence so long."

She warned him that the flattery was too gross for an ugly old woman, but he did not seem abashed.

"I made a mistake in adopting you for an aunt," he remarked. "I should not have done it if I had been old enough to appreciate the disadvantages of the relationship."

"You would have done better to have adopted me for a grandmother."

"Perhaps I should," he admitted. "A man may kiss his grandmother—with respect, of course."

Mrs. Crief laughed and admonished him to talk no more nonsense. "Tell me what you have been doing," she said. "How is it you're out of prison? When last I heard of you that was said to be imminent."

"I have escaped by the skin of my teeth—No, that's not true; by a good deal more than that. I wasn't even had up."

"Then it's better than you deserve. No, I'm not going to ask for an account of your sermon. I absolutely decline to flatter you on that point, or encourage you in such proceedings. I don't approve of them."

"Neither do I," Luttrell agreed. "But let me tell you, flattery won't encourage me. If you want to encourage me, tell me that I appeared an ecclesiastical pump, and assure me that I and my sayings are disposed of worthily in the limbo of things forgotten. I should be pleased to think that my

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sermon was wrapped in Sabbath sleep and buried six feet deep in pew dust."

"Did you make the wrong impression?" she asked with interest.

"I made about a dozen different impressions," Luttrell said ruefully; "besides, it is all very painful."

"Serves you right."

"Well, that doesn't make it any pleasanter."

Mrs. Crief took up her knitting. "Have you been found out?" she asked briskly. She always spoke in a quick business-like way.

"No," Luttrell answered, "I have not. I have told two people, though."

"Whatever for?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

She put down her work. "That's just like you," she exclaimed. "I have absolutely no patience with you. If you must tell lies, why don't you stick to them? There's not a penn'orth of system or reason in your doings, and there never has been."

Luttrell did not seem distressed by the charge. "Are you the aunt I have adopted all these years," he said, "and have you only just found that out?"

"I found out long ago," she replied shortly, "but you often surprise me still. Why did you tell these two people?"

"For various reasons—or want of them. I told one because he was a decent old chap and I thought he might as well know the truth. I told the other, principally, I think, because the spirit moved me."

Mrs. Crief found both reasons insufficient, and said as much; Luttrell replied that he was sorry, though he did not sound so. Then he inquired irrelevantly, "Have you ever stood on a pedestal? You haven't? Take my advice and don't, it's



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chilly and it's dizzy, and it's painfully exposed to the public eye. The wind whistles through your bones up there, and when you step over the edge, which is a thing that is possible, great is the fall thereof."

"I should call it a pulpit in your case, not a pedestal," Mrs. Crief observed severely. "Have you fallen?"

"I climbed down."

"Then you're not hurt."

"No, I wasn't exactly thinking of myself. I don't mind looking undignified; in fact, I rather like it, so little is expected of you. But other people have exalted views about statues, preachers and such. Some people don't like to see the climbing down; still, I am not sure I am sorry for it."

This last was added more to himself than to her. She looked up sharply and said, "It strikes me you have been doing some things you will regret, or ought to, at least."

"That is possible," he admitted; "in fact, I have a sackful of regrets, as many as any conscientious soul could wish. You want to know what they are? I preached a sermon that has not been forgotten, made a breach not easy to heal, and gave some good advice that will not be taken because the adviser was found bad. There's some to begin on."

"Enough to think about for some time," Mrs. Crief said. "Tell me what you have been doing since the sermon. Have you been officiating as curate ever since? If you have, I am not going to condone or approve it, so I warn you."

Luttrell assured her he had not done anything quite so bad. "I have been passing for a clergyman," he said, "but almost inadvertently, compara-



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tively few complications have arisen out of it. What has principally occupied me was a fever epidemic. I have had a glorious time; there is nothing in the world like a paternal despotism, when you're the despot. In this case the people did not mind it either; why, they even stood in a row and howled when their despot went away, which was ungrateful seeing he left behind the man who served them more and bullied them less."

"If you have no objection to explaining yourself," Mrs. Crief remarked, "I should be glad, as I really should like to know what you have been doing."

Luttrell explained, telling her a good deal about the Waterside and the epidemic that broke out there, speaking warmly in praise of Tollinger and not forgetting Mrs. Wythe or any other of the people likely to be interesting to his hearer. In course of talk he mentioned the two volunteers who came to help.

"Women?" Mrs. Crief asked briefly.

"Yes," Luttrell said. "Tollinger was annoyed; it was lovely to see him trying to turn them out."

"Did they go for him?" Mrs. Crief spoke as if she would have liked to have seen the doctor trying to dislodge her.

"Not exactly," Luttrell said, "though one did go."

"For you?" the old lady asked. "I thought as much. And the other, what became of her?"

"She wouldn't go."

"Not even for you? Dear me, how rude of her not to listen to your persuasions. Did you try to persuade her?"

"I made a considerable ass of myself."

"What was the name of this obstinate woman?" Mrs. Crief asked. "She must be interesting."



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"Why?"

"Because she interested you."

"She did, but how do you know?"

"You kept her in a place where it seems she had better not have been."

"But it was against my will," Luttrell protested, "I did not want the responsibility of her."

"My dear Anthony," Mrs. Crief answered, "I have known you twenty years, and I have never known you fail to persuade a person to your purpose when you were really bent on it. I don't deny that you often go a long way round, and represent things peculiarly, to say nothing harder—at times; misrepresent yourself occasionally too, and as a last resource play rather unscrupulously on the feelings of others, but you don't fail. Your father had something the same gift; you would both have made diplomatists if it were not for the restless vagabond strain that makes you"—she paused half a second, then concluded—"what you are," though it was clearly not what she had intended.

Luttrell did not deny the whole impeachment, although he said, "I am not such an irresistible liar as all that. At all events in this case I failed ignominiously. I tried to persuade that woman to go. I used all the arguments I knew, and in the doing so exhibited myself in a very unbecoming manner, but she stopped till she was ready to move on."

"H'm!" Mrs. Crief said. "Did you spare her feelings?"

"I had nothing to do with her feelings," Luttrell answered. "I stumbled upon her tragedy by accident, if that is what you mean, and was not cad enough to trade upon it even for her own good."



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Mrs. Crief nodded. "What was her name?" she asked.

"Lady Goyte-Curayl."

"Curayl?" the old lady repeated. "That must be Sebastian Curayl's daughter; she married Sir William Goyte, a man with money."

Luttrell had no idea that Mrs. Crief knew anything of the Curayls. "I have never heard you mention them," he said; "in fact I never heard of them at all to my knowledge till I preached at their church."

"And I," Mrs. Crief answered, "never heard that you preached at their church. You were careful not to give the name of the place where you officiated. As for the Curayls themselves, I have not seen anything of them for years; the daughter I have not seen at all. The father I knew when I was almost a girl—he was a very charming rascal in those days and singularly handsome. He was the most extravagant man I ever met and the best love-maker but one. He married one of the Inglebys, a good-looking girl and very rich but not old enough. She must have suffered! She had such proud sensitive lips, I remember; those kind of people suffer in silence and suffer cruelly. She died young, a good thing on the whole, I should think. What is the daughter like? She ought to be beautiful."

"She is," Luttrell answered; "in some respects not unlike what you describe the mother to have been, though perhaps not altogether."

"If she were like her mother," Mrs. Crief observed, "she would hardly have married as I heard she did."

This was not a subject Luttrell felt in a position to discuss, so he ignored it and only said, "She



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has got a capacity for work from some one, unless she originated it on her own account. She certainly can work, and she knows how to both give and take orders. Her coming to the Waterside made a lot of difference to the people there."

"She stayed there throughout the epidemic?" It struck Mrs. Crief as rather an odd proceeding. "Did her husband approve of that?"

"I did not inquire. I did not think the acquaintance warranted that."

"Oh!" Mrs. Crief said with amusement. "Have you also ceased being able to observe?"

"Well, yes, when the object under consideration isn't there."

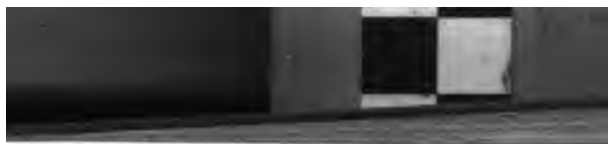
Mrs. Crief laughed outright. "Did Sir William allow his wife to stay till the very end?" she asked

"She stayed as long as there was any real need for her," Luttrell said.

"I wonder if I shall ever come across her," Mrs. Crief speculated after a pause. "I should rather like to see her for old sake's sake."

Luttrell said he thought it was most unlikely, and after that they spoke no more of Beatrice, Mrs. Crief instead asking after Luttrell's plans for the future.

"What am I going to do?" he said. "Well, I don't quite know. I have still got that packet to deliver as I told you, but it looks rather as if I had come across the right woman's tracks to-day. Stewart—you know Stewart, man with a red beard, a regular wandering Jew—he wanted me to go on some African expedition with him. It seems he has been trying to find me for some time, but I didn't hear anything of him or his expedition till I left the Waterside."



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"When you refused to go with him because of this packet, or for some other equally wise reason?"

"I told him I had got a job to do here, so I was afraid he would have to go without me; however, as it turns out I believe I can work the two together. Mrs. Fisher has gone to South Africa. I can write to her, but I rather think I will also call in person, it would be more satisfactory, and afterwards I could join Stewart."

Mrs. Crief nodded. She seemed to think the plan a good one. "If," said she, "this woman does not turn out to be the one you want, I suppose you will not think it your duty to leave Mr. Stewart in the lurch and come back to begin looking all over again?"

Luttrell did not fancy this difficulty would arise. "I think she is the right woman;" he said; "if she is not, I haven't an idea who is or how to find her, and that's a fact."

"In that case," the old lady advised, "you had certainly better not hurry back to look for her. A month or two won't make any difference. When shall you start?"

"Stewart starts next week. I may as well go with him. My affairs, as you know, can settle themselves; they are used to that."

Mrs. Crief nodded again; the plan was excellent in her opinion. She gave it all the encouragement she could, though she did not indicate why.

It was not till Luttrell had gone and there was no one to hear that she observed. "My dear Anthony, you are a deal better in Africa, north, south, east or west, than wandering about Curayl and the Waterside, delivering ridiculous packets, and incidentally giving good advice that will not



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be taken and doing other regrettable things. Go, by all means, and stop there. I must try if I can make Lady Goyte-Curayl's acquaintance. She should be interesting, certainly she should be."



CHAPTER XVI

MRS. CRIEF seldom left Brighton when she was once settled there for the winter, but that year she made an exception. She went to town in the first instance to attend the coming of age festivities of her god-daughter, who was also the daughter of an old friend ; and she stayed in town for some time afterwards on account of Beatrice Curayl.

The coming of age festivities were of a quiet and informal order. The mother, having older unmarried daughters, did not believe in emphasizing a girl's age by an entertainment not to be forgotten. There was a family dinner at which there were present, besides relatives, both Mrs. Crief and Mr. Hazler, who was a friend of long standing. He and Mrs. Crief had met more than once before and had always found several points in common. That evening they naturally got together, and, while the relatives discussed family affairs, and the young guests, who had arrived with the coffee, danced, they two had a long and uninterrupted talk.

It was during this, and quite by accident, that Sir William Goyte's name happened to be mentioned. Mr. Hazler referred to him casually as an example of the successful business man, the subject then under discussion. But Mrs. Crief caught at the



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name and at once left the general for the particular. "Do you know him?" she asked. She put it in the present tense, for she had not heard of his death.

"We were connected with him professionally," Mr. Hazler said. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I know—at least I am interested in his wife."

The lawyer turned to her at once. "Are you indeed," he said. "I am glad, very glad. Do you know you are the first person I have heard of who has more than an acquaintanceship with her. I never came across a woman so totally alone."

"I can't say I know her exactly," Mrs. Crief felt bound to say, "but I feel a very considerable interest in her. I knew her father, a good while ago, it is true, but rather intimately, and I knew her mother too. I should much like to meet their daughter; in fact I came to town fully determined to make her acquaintance."

The lawyer looked a little disappointed. "I hoped," he said, "that you already knew her—well enough for her to listen to your advice."

"I am not sure that she is given to taking advice," Mrs. Crief said.

"Perhaps not," Mr. Hazler admitted; "but she would listen if you were to talk to her, that is if you were her friend. She might not care to take advice exactly, but she could no doubt talk the situation over with you as she cannot with me, a stranger. As things are, it is absurd—she is practically penniless."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Crief's voice rang sharply, and the lawyer wondered why the shrewd kindly eyes flinched almost as if with a sudden fear. He did not know the thought his words had called up to one who knew nothing of Sir William's death.



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A rich man's wife who was penniless meant an irreparable breach. Luttrell had spoken of a breach of his making not soon to be healed. Was it this? the old lady asked herself. But she put the idea from her. It was not possible; he could not have done this thing; he was above the vulgarity of such an intrigue. A sudden anger, begotten perhaps of the momentary fear, flamed up against any one who should think such a thing. She was an old woman and a tolerant, and she knew that the world and its men are a long way from the angels, and she was not hard on them for it. But one corner of her heart was still young enough to believe in this man, and when Mr. Hazler spoke she felt like a young girl, all cold and sick and ashamed at the first coming of the horrible suspicion. Luttrell—restless, faulty, unworthy, persuasive—she called him all that, she did not pretend him to be any hero but her own—Luttrell, guilty of this sin of the senses. He, too, in the brutally frank words of scripture, “neighing after his neighbour's wife” like the other “overfed and under-worked!”—never! She would never believe it! She turned to the lawyer with decision.

“Please tell me just what you mean and what has happened,” she said in her business-like way. “Oh, I know it isn't professional etiquette,” as he hesitated—“but you must please to tell me for all that. I may be able to do a little good. Besides, really I have some right to know. I know Lady Goyte's family and its ways pretty well. Why, her father was foolish enough to propose marriage to me, though I hadn't more than half enough to pay his tailor's bills, and if I had rashly accepted him he would have been bound to cry off the next day. I knew Beatrice Ingleby, her mother too, and—and several others concerned; so please let me hear all about



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it, and then let us see if together we two wise people cannot concoct some plan for setting things to rights."

Thus adjured Mr. Hazler told what he knew, and if it was not what Mrs. Crief was now determined to disbelieve, it still left loopholes for suspicion.

"Is Sir William dead?" she exclaimed. "I never heard of it. When did it happen?"

He told her, and it was after Luttrell had left England. Then he gave her all the facts he had, including his own visit to the lonely house of Curayl, and Beatrice's subsequent refusal to touch her husband's money.

"For what reason?" Mrs. Crief asked.

"She gave none, at least none adequate."

In her heart the old lady commended this silence, though condemned the refusal as being likely to give rise to scandalous talk, even perhaps inculpating Luttrell.

"She ought most certainly to take what is due to her," she said. "It doesn't matter what are her reasons for refusing, there are a dozen better why she should not."

"I wish you would see her and talk to her about it," Mr. Hazler said. "I believe you could persuade her to take a sensible view if any one could."

"I shall most certainly try," Mrs. Crief returned briskly. "Tell me all the details you can, so that I shall know how the land lies."

The lawyer obeyed, so that before the end of the evening she knew not only all he did but more besides, for she surmised it for herself.

The next day she began the work of making Beatrice's acquaintance. She did not succeed that day nor the next, it took her some little time, but she accomplished it in the end, and in so satisfactory



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a manner that the acquaintanceship was begun at the right end and neither afterwards regretted it. Although, as Mrs. Crief told Mr. Hazler, it was by no means a foregone conclusion the results would be all they had intended. "Advise her, my dear man!" she said to him, "of course not. She is a woman quite capable of judging for herself and quite determined to do it. What reason has she for imagining my opinion is worth anything? Oh, I'm not going to give the case up, don't think that, it isn't my way. I'm obstinate, very obstinate; besides, I like Lady Goyte, she isn't a fool. I like her for herself, and she interests me on other accounts. But we must have time, you ought to know that. You and I are old enough not to hurry. It is only the young who must make such desperate haste; they reckon to have but fifty or sixty years for all they want to do; but we old folks, being near it, feel we can draw on eternity. Life has taught us we can safely leave a few things to 'the mills of God.' There now," she said stopping herself and smiling,—"I'm taking to preaching too. You must forgive an old woman's garrulousness. As to Lady Goyte-Curayl—Mrs. Curayl, I hear they call her in her own place—as to her, I haven't yet condemned her decision, because I do not know if she has chosen what is wrong or merely what is uncomfortable. Her present idea is that she will train for a nurse; from something I have heard I believe she is not altogether unfit for the profession, though of course her appearance and manner are against it. She will want money for her training, and to get it she will have to sell some of her property, if not all. She will keep the house, she says, if possible; the rest she seems curiously willing to part with. I don't quite understand her, I confess. Of course all this will take



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time. Fortunately you can't dispose of property all in a minute; she could not, even if she would, begin training at once. She is not really anxious to do so, she wants to go back to Curayl for a while. It's a gloomy place, you say? I can quite believe it is gloomy, and probably has a skeleton in its cupboard or even a skeleton in each of its cupboards. The Curayls were the sort of people to acquire such things—a whole charnel-house of skeletons. But you must remember Lady Goyte is a Curayl, and unless I am much mistaken quite used to family skeletons. She is not like her mother in that. I should think she started with her eyes open, and a copious disbelief in men and things, at all events she has got it now. She is not going to Curayl at once, she says; there seems a good deal for her to do and see to in town. Perhaps you can make a little more of it; the longer you can spin things out and keep her in town the more chances I shall have of trying to make her see reason. Mind, I'm not at all sure we shall ever succeed, but the longer the time the greater the chances."

It perhaps ought not to be recorded that Mr. Hazler obeyed these instructions. He was a man of such integrity and standing that one could hardly have expected him to do it, even for Beatrice's good. It was quite likely therefore that circumstances and not persons were to blame for the way Sir William's affairs lagged. Certainly something was to blame, for Beatrice was kept in town over some business or other for a long time; and during that time she saw much of Mrs. Crief.

The old lady was the only person she did see; she was in too deep mourning to receive acquaintances, and friends she had none. Mrs. Crief did not seem quite to belong to either category; she was on



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a footing of her own, and during the long lonely days Beatrice was glad of her visits, sometimes even really thankful for her company and her conversation. Mostly, it must be admitted, they spoke of what was more or less impersonal ; Beatrice at least showed no desire to discuss her affairs past or future. She had a method of steering away from her own concerns which Mrs. Crief could not but admire as skilful, though at the same time it annoyed because it baulked her. At last, however, when she had seen Beatrice a good many times she decided to speak out.

"My dear," she said, "I hear that you refuse to receive any of your husband's money. Is it true?"

Beatrice said it was. She was surprised by the question, but she did not resent it ; it did not seem unwarrantable when asked by Mrs. Crief.

"Do you think it was quite wise?" she asked gravely.

"Wise?" Beatrice queried. "I never thought about the wisdom. It seems unavoidable, that is all."

"Did it ever occur to you how it would strike other people?" Mrs. Crief inquired. "There is a large idle public always ready to find motives for what we do."

"I suppose so, but they are not concerned with my motives, and I am not concerned with their thoughts."

"Not their thoughts of yourself, perhaps. But supposing they inculcate the dead—and the living?"

The shrewd eyes looked up keenly for a second, but they encountered nothing but genuine surprise.

"The living?" Beatrice asked, and clearly she did not even follow the thought.

The old lady did not explain, so she went on to



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state her reasons as she had done to Mr. Hazler before.

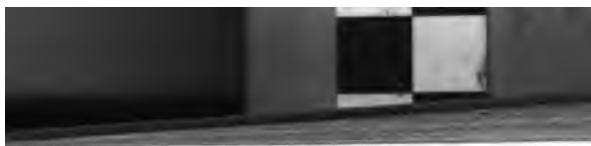
Mrs. Crief nodded, then she remarked in the abrupt fashion some of her friends resented, "I suppose you and your husband fell out."

"Yes," Beatrice said, "I am afraid we did."

"But no doubt you would have fallen in again if he had lived long enough. It seems to me somewhat unfair to credit the dead with the unforgiving spirit you choose to attribute to Sir William. Husbands and wives do fall out, sometimes very seriously, but after a time they put a decent face on things, patch it up and go on again not much the worse for it. I don't know why you two shouldn't have done so."

Beatrice fancied she knew, but she did not say so, and in any case Mrs. Crief would not have been convinced. They talked further on the subject then and later; the ice being once broken the elder woman saw no reason why they should not discuss the other's affairs at length. They did so up to a certain point. Beatrice was quite willing to listen to all Mrs. Crief might say; she seemed really pleased to do so, and never resented even her plainest speaking; but for her own part she gave little or no information, and in the end did not take the advice offered her. Sir William's money she would not and did not touch. When it became evident that she could not avoid the nominal possession of it, she determined to make over the whole anonymously to charities. And this determination she carried out to the indignation of several people, though not till after she had gone back to Curayl.

She was kept some while in London, but at last there came a time when there was no longer any reason for her to stay. Mrs. Crief parted reluctantly



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with her ; she had grown to be interested in her for her own sake as well as others. They had met a great many times and spoken of a great many things, but Luttrell's name had never been mentioned between them. On the last afternoon the old lady determined to introduce it. She got her opportunity when Beatrice spoke of the profession she meant to follow.

"Nursing ? " Mrs. Crief said. " Oh, yes, you told me before. It's not work I should choose myself, but I should think you might do well with it ; at all events you must have had some practice with that outbreak of fever last year. Anthony seemed to think highly of the help you gave then."

Which was Anthony ? Beatrice's mind shaped the question. Was it the doctor, or the other ? Aloud she only said—" I expect you are thinking of the time last summer when there was an epidemic of fever among my tenants at the Waterside. You must have heard of it from Dr. Tollinger or his friend, Mr. Luttrell. They were both staying in the place and were splendid. They worked indefatigably ; the whole district owes them a debt of gratitude."

Mrs. Crief's face twisted into a little smile of inward amusement ; the even well-bred voice with exactly the right measure of interest and enthusiasm amused her a good deal. She had known the Major, a man who never lost his temper, his self-control or his handkerchief. His daughter was not like him. It was possible to conceive that she might on rare occasions lose all three, but she had inherited something of his manner. At least so Mrs. Crief thought, and a very fine manner too.

" I heard all about it from Anthony Luttrell," she said. " He is an old friend of mine, in fact I have known him a very great many years."



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"Indeed? I hope when he was telling you about the fever, he did not forget to say how much he did for the poor people himself. They will not forget it, they came almost to adore him."

Mrs. Crief nodded. "That's not for what he did," she said, "but for the way he did it; I have seen it before. I have seen his two pence buy more gratitude and service than another man's two shillings. And it's quite fair too; the other man might say Anthony does not give value for what he gets, but he does; sympathy and tact and a kindly manner are sometimes worth as much as meat and drink. It is the case of 'better the dinner of herbs and contentment therewith' over again. And the manner, like contentment, is not to be had for the wishing; it costs something as well as being worth something I know for I haven't the patience myself to be pleasant when I don't feel pleasant. I snap when I am in the humour, no matter who is hurt."

Beatrice listened and said nothing; she had come to regard Luttrell's manner as part of his outfit of deception, and to feel almost angry when she remembered the affection he had won and the influence she had seen him exercise. Yet now she felt bound to allow some truth in Mrs. Crief's words; sympathy, tact and courtesy in trivial everyday dealings were worth something. If the Waterside people liked Luttrell it was because to them he was likeable; he was not an estimable person, but all his acts, where they were concerned, rang true; they were too simple and uneducated to be deceived, he was worthy of their affection. Beatrice admitted as much to herself.

"I wish you would tell me all about that fever time"—Mrs. Crief's voice roused her from thought.

"I will tell you anything I can," Beatrice answered,



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and began to talk about different incidents that had taken place. She was careful to keep herself in the background and though she mentioned Luttrell's name often, no incident they shared was spoken of.

Mrs. Crief listened with an occasional comment and question. At the end, though she could not have given very good reasons for it, she was nearly certain Beatrice was one of those two to whom Luttrell had confessed his deception. Beatrice, the old lady was sure of it, did not regard him as a clergyman in spite of what he might have appeared at the Waterside; she judged him—but it was impossible to say how she judged him. Major Curayl's daughter, especially after having spent some years as the unloved and unloving wife of such a man as Sir William Goyte, would not be likely to betray her feelings.

"You found Anthony and Dr. Tollinger at the Waterside when you got there?" the old lady said at last. "Did you hear how they happened to come?"

"Dr Tollinger was taking a holiday in the neighbourhood," Beatrice answered. "He was most kind in attending the Waterside people."

"And Anthony?" Mrs. Crief queried. "Do you know how he came to be there?"

Beatrice hesitated a moment. If Mrs. Crief had known him twenty years she would know him in his real not his assumed character; there was no need to betray his fraud to his friend. She determined not to do so; indeed she was almost jealously anxious to keep his discreditable secret.

"I don't know how he came to be at the Waterside," she said, and it was true. "He was at Curayl a little while before."

"Yes," Mrs. Crief rejoined, "and was called from



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there to a man who was dying of fever, to receive from him some ridiculous keepsake and message for a woman whose name he never heard. It was then he found out about the typhus, and, seeing there was no one much to do anything, determined to stay, though it would have been wiser, and safer too, for him to go away at once—not only on account of infection, but also because of the part he had been forced into playing.”

“I did not know that,” Beatrice said.

“Did you not?” Mrs. Crief answered. “I can tell you all about it; one way and another I happen to know a great deal.”

Beatrice might have professed no interest and no desire to hear what Luttrell had not thought fit to tell her, but she did not remember to do so. Mrs. Crief told the whole affair as it was known to her, and if she presented the facts in a light not unfavourable to Luttrell it was because, in spite of what she had said to him, she saw them so herself.

Beatrice listened silently. Mrs. Crief could not afterwards remember that she made any particular comment, or seemed more than politely interested, either then or later; which was annoying to the old lady, for she had a conviction that an injustice had somehow been done to Luttrell. She went away that afternoon feeling that the whole of her acquaintance with Lady Goyte-Curayl was something of a failure; indeed, a failure in every particular except for the fact that she had come to like her for herself, and to be genuinely and sympathetically anxious to help her unravel the life tangle which she kept so proudly and persistently out of reach.

And Beatrice sat alone in the gloomy London house thinking—thinking—and her thoughts seemed



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to be difficult. It is difficult to suddenly make room for a new class of creature, outside old experience and not to be judged by the old rigid standards, demanding something much more elastic—a creature not black or white, or even the neutral grey that experience had painted half the world, but composite, the brightest white and the blackest black. This was not easy to a mind like Beatrice's, but she was very honest with herself as well as others, so she did grasp the possibility of the thing's existence and, to judge by her face, was a little glad to do so.

She went and stood by the fireplace, smiling a little as her thoughts wandered back over those strange busy weeks at the Waterside. A dozen trivial incidents crystallized for a moment in her mind, and melted almost as they came. She recalled Lottie's being taken ill, Luttrell's coming, and the child's sleeping in his arms. She remembered his singing to her when she woke, she remembered very clearly the words he sang—

Friend of wayfaring men,
Not beyond earthly ken,
Wept with us, laughed with us now and then—

She did not know what the words represented to the singer—a conviction, a fancy, or nothing at all ; to her they gained a new meaning now that she more fully understood him. She began to wonder how it was that she had not comprehended him earlier, why she had for a moment thought him hero and perfect priest, and why, most of all, when he confessed himself otherwise, she had relentlessly put him at the other end of the scale ; not seeing that his place was between, his very power lying in his personal knowledge of all that was between. She



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had one virtue herself, she was true in word and deed and thought, and because this man had failed according to her standard she had condemned him unheard. A bitter anger against herself rose up within her—she had misjudged him ; more, in her anger against him, she had even herself fallen from her own standard, failing in honesty to fulfil her bargain, for no better reason than because it was he who pointed out the duty of it.

“I would like to see him once more,” she said. “I owe him an apology if ever one did.”

She raised her eyes from the fire. There was a glass hanging over the mantelpiece ; when she looked up she met her own eyes reflected and looked away quickly. They told her something that she had really known if not admitted before, something about the man whom she had once compared to the magic piper of Hamelin. Well she remembered the day when she told him her fancy, and he in return had asked her if, like the fabled piper, he should be refused payment when he sent in his bill. He had sent it in—a little mercy, a little tolerance for what was outside her scheme of things, that was all—and she had refused. But he had had his revenge, for, like the other piper, he had since then played that wonderful world-old melody on the heart-strings which is not to be forgotten or resisted. Unconsciously and without knowing it, yet none the less irresistibly, had he touched the key-note sacred to the master-musician of the world. She must never see him again, never, lest he should discover what had come to pass and in his turn despise.



CHAPTER XVII

SPRING came to Curayl and then summer, but there was no one in the old grey house to see them. It was all shut up, its mistress away in London, preparing, it was said, to be a hospital nurse. Gainsford was much interested in the news ; it was such a strange thing for a Curayl to do. Had Lady Goyte solaced her poverty and her widowhood with somebody else's husband, the little town could have understood it in one of her family, but that she should seriously take up nursing was beyond belief. However, it seemed she was in town for that, and the place saw her no more. It was whispered that she was trying to sell some of the property, but if it was true so far she had not succeeded, there had been no change of owners, every one was sure on that point. And in the meantime the gardens at Curayl were neglected, the cottages in the village needed repairs, and the diminished Water-side settlement was as crazy as ever.

Gainsford had a good deal to say about the Water-side. Last year should have been a lesson, was the general opinion, and something ought to be done. At the beginning of the summer something was done, though not by the town ; Lady Goyte-Curayl had all the remaining tenants evicted and the old houses left to fall down. No one knew her reason,

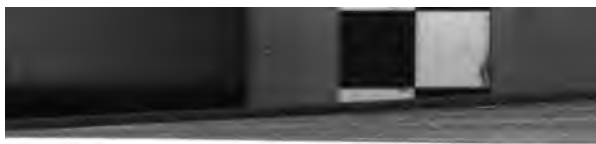


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though it was pretty generally guessed to be because she could not afford to put the place into repair. Gainsford was of opinion that she had done quite right; several persons expressed themselves pleased to know that the Waterside was cleared out at last, although a proportion of the people cleared out did come to live in the town or near it. Still they were the more respectable ones on the whole, and anyhow it was a good thing the distant settlement was abolished, it was a constant cause of annoyance and even danger.

But with the clearing of the Waterside troubles did not end for Gainsford, rather they came nearer, alarmingly near. For when August came again, there also came a return of the fever, how or why no one could tell. The remaining Waterside folk did not bring it when they came two months earlier, indeed, they all escaped the second visitation. It was the people of Gainsford themselves, "our own respectable poor," as the rector said, that suffered this undeserved visitation.

Consternation reigned in the little town, and something very like terror laid hold on the more timid inhabitants. This in spite of the fact that the epidemic was of a much milder order than that of last year, and, owing to the greatly superior conditions, did not spread in the same way. But in spite of alarm Gainsford rose to the occasion, at least so it was locally said. The second outbreak was treated rather differently from the first—better managed, those concerned maintained. People were said to be "prepared" and there was a great deal of reporting and some inspecting. It was not, as was the affair of last year, "regarded as a private enterprise to be exploited for its experimental interest." At least so said one of those in



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authority, who still smarted from a recollection of Tollinger's caustic remarks when he was called to account for some of his doings at the Waterside.

Tollinger himself was a good deal interested in this return of the fever ; when he heard of it, it was not long before he came to Gainsford. He came unofficially, merely to spend a quiet Sunday with the Rangers, and of course he was anxious to hear all that was going on. He made many inquiries and observed several things on his own account, and before long satisfied himself, at least, that this second outbreak owed its origin to an old well that lay outside the wall of Curayl churchyard. Just inside, in a remote corner, they had buried one of the first of the fever victims from the Waterside—that was in the days before Luttrell gave way and undertook the burial service himself. The well was not quite close to the wall, some said not close enough to matter, but the doctor maintained it was quite near enough considering the nature of the soil and the slope of the ground. In the ordinary way the well was no longer used, there were now no houses near ; but that summer there had been a Sunday school picnic in the fields close by, and some of the children drew water and drank it, and it was with just those children that the fever began.

Tollinger was triumphant ; he proved his case fully and clearly. More, he found justification for the high-handed burning of the typhus bodies, for which he had been earlier called to account. If, he said, all the bodies had been burnt, if he had been firm and not given way to the foolish prejudice of ignorant people, Gainsford might have been spared this. It did not in the least matter to him that Gainsford was far from agreeing with him ; the case was proved ; people could accept the proof or not as they liked.



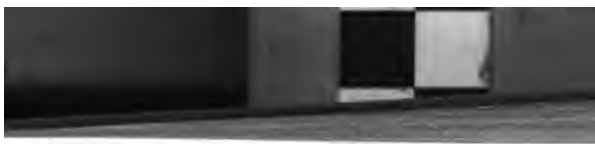
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They liked not for a time ; afterwards they came round with a swing to his way of thinking, but that, it must be admitted, was less for his logic than Luttrell's beguiling tongue ; it never would have occurred if Luttrell had not come back once more. He did not come for that purpose, and he did not intend to stay when he came, but his inherent taste for superintending other people's affairs kept him in the district when once he got there, and also set him placing Tollinger, his works and words, in a fitting light, but this was not till the middle of September.

Throughout August Gainsford managed its own affairs. Tollinger, in London, expressed his opinions on them in letters to the local paper, and Luttrell was a name forgotten. The fever followed its course, picking out its victims here and there, mostly among the poorer classes. Some few of the well-to-do suffered, and there was one case which raised widespread sympathy—it was that of Helen Ranger. How she caught the fever no one knew; she had it, that was all her distracted father could tell Tollinger, for whom he sent.

Tollinger came in answer to the urgent incoherent telegram, came as fast as the train could bring him, sitting staring grimly before him throughout the journey with a strange tightness about his throat and a new light in his mind. All through the past months he had been to and fro to the Rangers' cosy home whenever he had a Sunday to spare. He did not know why he went, or why he liked their simple old-fashioned ways ; but now he knew, now that he knew Helen lay at death's door. He knew even before he reached the house, before he stood with her father beside the bed.

"I sent for you," the old man said, while the tears ran unnoticed down his cheeks, "because you



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brought her back to me before. I thought you would come. I'd no business to call you away from town ; you're busy, I know, and our doctor, he's a clever man and has known my little girl since she was a baby. But I wanted you to see her ; you saw a deal of it before, and you gave her back to me then. You'll do it now if anybody can."

Tollinger nodded ; he could not speak. He did not say that it was not he who sent her back then, and he would not say that it was not for any to control the issues of life and death now. For a long minute he stood saying nothing at all, and when he did speak it was only to mutter, " I will do what I can," and then turn abruptly away.

But what could he do ?—what could any do ? So little, so very little. All that money and lavish care could provide was there, all that skill and experience and love could devise was done, and what did it amount to ? Little more, it seemed, than had been done for a dozen at the Waterside. The Waterside folk recovered—Tollinger told Mr. Ranger so stoutly—a great many of them ; it seemed to him wonderful now to think how comparatively few of them died. Some of them could have been well spared, he thought, very well indeed, and Helen—she could not, should not go ! Her mother could not spare her, her neighbours could not spare her, and her father—the light of his life would go out with her. And he, he himself, what did he lose if he lost her ? His had been a somewhat lonely loveless life ; he had only just begun to find the sweetness and gentleness it might hold. Was he to lose it all now ?

" They want us to send her away." It was Mr. Ranger's voice that spoke. " They say she ought to go to the fever hospital—as if we would ever let



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her go ! I said they would have to take me if they took her."

Tollinger had heard similar arguments, though perhaps used under different circumstances ; he had combated them successfully then, he did not attempt to now. "Of course she must remain here," he said ; "you are quite isolated, there is no danger to outsiders. If your servants are afraid, they can go. You are not likely to grudge the expense that will be incurred. There is no reason why she should be moved."

There was a reason why it should be suggested, though, and Mr. Ranger explained it. "We made a rule at the outset," he said, "I mean the Committee said that any one and every one should be sent to the fever hospital. We all agreed to it when we arranged for the hospital. We said we would send our own if they were taken ill. We said it to encourage the poor people ; of course we never thought that any of ours could take it. And now they want me to send her for the sake of example—but I won't do it ! I won't ! I'll break my word twice over first. I'll pay fines and go to prison if they like, but I'll never let them take my little girl away."

And Tollinger nodded. He knew very well that if Helen was taken to Gainsford hospital, he, being on bad terms with the authorities by reason of his caustic letters, would not be allowed to attend her. Accordingly, though it was strictly against his principles, he agreed with all Mr. Ranger said and even added something about seeing the committee damned before he let her go.

Throughout the remainder of that day and the night that followed he watched by Helen, doing the little all that was possible even to his skill and experience. She was not conscious of his presence :



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sometimes she lay in a stupor ; sometimes her mind wandered so that she muttered incoherently, or else talked of the things that haunted her brain. It was perhaps only natural that the epidemic itself should be greatly on her mind, and that she should confuse this year's outbreak and last. Over and over again she spoke of them both, seeming to argue with herself as to whether or no she ought to help. More than once she spoke Luttrell's name ; he had said she ought not to do this, and ought to do that. What, Tollinger did not know, but it was clear that she did not think she had obeyed ; she had failed in something, and it seemed to be on her mind. Once or twice she appeared to be speaking of it to him, but when he answered, trying to calm, she was not calmed—clearly it was to Luttrell, not him, that she meant to speak. He grew angry with the man in his mind. It was natural enough that Helen's thoughts should couple him with the typhus outbreak, that was not to be resented. Even the doctor found that he himself did it, and almost unconsciously began to wish him here ; there was something inspiring in his cheerful company, and to restless patients and anxious watchers something soothing and reassuring in his personality. Tollinger was ready to admit all that ; and to admit that, for his own part, he would rather have had Luttrell at the Waterside last year than two men of medicine. Yet he grew angry now, for it seemed that Helen still regarded him as perfect priest, and her mind was troubled by some falling away from a code he had lain down. Tollinger raged inwardly as he thought of the white soul thus troubled by words of Luttrell's saying.

Shortly after dawn an idea came to him. It was not perhaps the sort of idea he would usually have encouraged, but at this time he said and did



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many things that were unlike his usual self ; he was labouring under several strange new emotions, and so came to be guided more by impulse and less by reason than of old. When this idea came, he did not scout it, he gave it room in his mind, and it grew till, before the house was astir, it had completely taken possession of him.

Luttrell had not been back in England much more than a week. Of the fever at Gainsford he knew nothing—he had not heard or seen anything of Tollinger since he came home. The first news he had was an urgent telegram, sent from Gainsford, asking him to come at once. “Wire train, will meet you on Curayl road,” was the concluding sentence.

Why Curayl ? Luttrell asked himself with a sudden thought of Beatrice. Next moment he remembered that were anything wrong there Tollinger would not be concerned in it or he himself wanted. He telegraphed the first train he could, and went by it.

Harvest was early that year ; the fields just outside Gainsford were already cleared, so the road to Curayl was very quiet and almost deserted. When Luttrell came along it there was one figure only in sight, Tollinger walking to meet him with his head down, seeing nothing.

“Hulloah, old chap ! What’s the matter ? ” Luttrell asked, more as if they had parted last night instead of last year.

Tollinger stopped, for the first time seeing the other.

“She is dying,” he said brusquely.

“*What !*”

The monosyllable fell brief and hard, and for half a second a different man looked out of Luttrell’s



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eyes, a primitive natural man with passions and emotions, very unlike the pleasant-mannered, easy person whom Tollinger had known. But he did not see it, he was taken up with his own affairs.

"They have got the fever again," he said; "here in Gainsford this time. She has taken it. It is not true to say she is dying—yet—but it's a bad case, she is very ill."

"Who?"

"Helen Ranger."

"Helen Ranger?" Luttrell repeated. He had recovered his usual manner before this, and with it his powers of observation. Helen's name not only lifted a horrible fear from his mind, but as uttered by the doctor also suggested something quite new.

"When was she taken ill?" he asked. "Is it a very bad case?"

Tollinger said it was, and gave some details which Luttrell, by the light of his Waterside experience, knew to be serious.

He listened sympathetically. "I am awfully sorry, old man," he said at last.

The doctor flushed like a girl. "For her father," he snapped; "so am I."

"For you," Luttrell said quietly, and somehow Tollinger forgot to resent it.

"Which way are we going?" Luttrell inquired. "We had better not stand here if there is anything to be done. Is it forward or back we go?"

"Neither," Tollinger answered shortly.

"In that case let's get over a gate," and Luttrell got over as he spoke.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Come and see her."

Luttrell had sat down under the hedge; he looked up in some surprise. "Of course if you wish it,"



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he said, "though I shan't be much good. Are we to start at once?"

"No, you have got to dress for it first," Tollinger replied, with meaning. "You're a parson still here, you know."

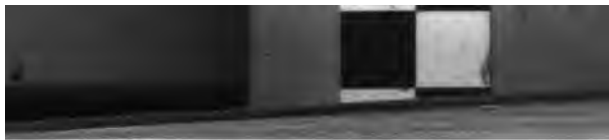
"That doesn't matter," Luttrell assured him. "I'll tell them I have left the church or anything else you like. Let us go now," and he rose to his feet.

But Tollinger would not have it. "No," he said, "you must dress for it. You must get the clothes how you can—borrow them, steal them, I don't care; but you must get them, even if you have to go to town for them, and when you have got them come again. I tell you it won't do without, it will bother her. She believes in you—she is troubling her innocent soul about some of the jargon you talked to her when you played the part before."

"That I talked to her?" Luttrell said in amazement and some consternation.

"Yes, you." Tollinger answered. "Oh, I tell you it makes me sick to hear her bothering her head about something she thinks she has done wrong, according to you—you of all people! But she believes in you and thinks your words inspired. Your parsoning never struck me as particularly wrong before, I didn't see any harm in it, but I didn't foresee this sort of thing."

"Neither did I," Luttrell said grimly, but to himself, not to Tollinger. This newly-discovered effect of his doings at Curayl came as something of a shock to him. There had been some unpleasant consequences, things not to be forgotten, but he did not expect to have to reopen the matter at another point. To find that he and his words still lived in this way and in this girl's mind was painful indeed, and somehow humiliating too.



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Tollinger began to pace the uneven stubble restlessly. He talked as he did so; he said a good many things—perhaps some, as he grew warm to the subject, that he might afterwards have regretted if he remembered them. Luttrell did not answer him, it is possible that he did not even hear all; he leaned against the bank, his hands in his pockets, his eyes looking out across the smooth yellow field, and his face expressing nothing that the doctor could understand. He was reviewing his acts and their consequences, and finding it more instructive than pleasing.

At last he roused himself. "The question is, What is to be done?" he said.

Tollinger stopped. "Dress," he answered, "and afterwards come and see her and talk to her. She doesn't know me; she may you; but she will understand, you can make her, and you can soothe her. You have the most extraordinary soothing influence over fever patients. I have seen it plenty of times. You will be able to get hold of her wandering mind. I cannot, though she is—what she is to me—but you will be able to—that is the damnable part of it! You must come, and you must make her believe that she has not transgressed your precious words. If you say it she will believe it, and be easy in her mind.

Luttrell nodded; he thought it was probable that he could do that. Under other circumstances it might have amused him to hear the doctor prescribing so unacknowledged and intangible a remedy, but it did not now at all. "You mean," he said, "you want me to go on with the fraud."

"Yes," Tollinger answered relentlessly; "the thing has gone too far for you to do any good by clearing it up with her now."



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He forgot that he once said that he had never met with a difficulty wherein a man improved things by going on instead of turning back. Luttrell did not remind him of it, and he went on. "She thinks a great deal about—about that sort of thing. She might be more soothed—I believed she would be—if she saw you as a parson praying for her. If she could understand that you prayed for her to get over it—I believe it might make a lot of difference."

A thin smile of self-contempt curled Luttrell's lips for a moment. "I am allotted a singularly noble part," he observed.

"Eh? Yes," the doctor answered without hearing; he was following his own train of thought. "Prayer does make a difference——" he muttered, moving restlessly again. "If I knew how, I mean if I believed—Oh, hang it! I'd give my right hand for a little more faith and a little less knowledge."

He took a turn away from the gate and Luttrell moved as if to go. "I don't know that I need stick at a trifle now," he said with flippant bitterness, "the fraud may as well be finished off in style." The doctor seemed to become suddenly aware of his presence. "I never know how much of you is fraud," he said, as if the puzzle had just recurred to him. "You can't be all fraud, else we shouldn't have believed in you so. There must be something behind, or you would not have had the power you did. That time we first burnt the bodies, you were in earnest then? That prayer—well, what you said then—it sticks in my head; it meant more to me than anything in the way of religion that I ever heard."

Luttrell made for the gate; he, more than most men, was shy of speaking of the belief by which he



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really lived. Unforeseen circumstances, arising certainly out of his own act, had compelled him more than once to come very near having to express it, but this need not be an occasion.

"The body-burning," he said hastily as he dropped into the road, "that at least was a good thing, one not-to-be-regretted result of my fraud."

"Yes," Tollinger agreed; "the pity was you didn't start it sooner. They need never have had typhus at Gainsford this year if they hadn't buried a body, a hot bed of fever germs, so that the grave drained neatly into a well. The rank imbecility of people is beyond belief!"

Luttrell stopped with his hands on the gate. "Tell me about it," he said.

The doctor did so. At the end Luttrell said, "Thank you," with meaning. Even here it seemed he was not blameless; it was his scruples that were responsible for these first burials. Truly this "little matter" at Curayl had "kindled a great fire"; whatever reparation was within his power he was bound to make.

Late that afternoon Tollinger came down the quiet white road again. This time he had not come far from the Rangers' house before he met the station fly. It was stopped, and Luttrell got out; he was dressed once more in clerical black. The doctor looked him over and seemed satisfied. They walked on together, saying nothing, each possibly finding his own thoughts sufficiently bad company. Just as they opened the Rangers' gate Luttrell spoke:—

"I don't want to see Mr. and Mrs. Ranger," he said, and his curt tone demanded compliance. "You understand? I can't see them. If they are in the girl's room you must turn them out before I go up. I am going through with this thing, I'll do it thor-



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oughly, but there must be no audience. I can't play to the gallery as well."

Tollinger nodded. It would be awkward to arrange for such a thing at a moment's notice, and it did not seem to him necessary, but though he was usually a contumacious person he did not think of refusing now. "All right," he said, "you had better wait there," and he pointed to the seat under the mulberry tree; then he hurried into the house.

What he said and how he explained matters he did not know; no doubt he said something foolish and certainly very brusque—tact was never his strong point even when he was not consumed by anxiety and impatience. But he had his way; he sent the nurse and mother from the room, and saw the father was not about the stairs, and then went back to the open door.

As he reached it Luttrell rose and came in. He looked straight before him, like a man who goes through something shameful and is too proud to look to right or left. Tollinger opened his lips to say something, but shut them without speaking, he did not know why. He led the way upstairs, past closed doors, through the silent house, till he came to the girl's white room. There he stopped, opened the door and Luttrell went in. For a moment he paused on the threshold, a tall black figure against the whiteness. It seemed almost as if he hesitated, not determined what to do, then he went suddenly forward as if on impulse. Straight he went till he came to the bed, there he dropped upon his knees and covered his face with his hands.

Tollinger shut the door; he did not understand. Now more than ever was the man inexplicable to him, but he loyally left the closed door and kept watch at the stair-head. Luttrell might be an actor,



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but there was something unlike acting in the grim set face and the humiliation of the attitude.

“Fraud,” the doctor snorted to himself, and he blew his nose hard, “if that was fraud, then there’s nothing real in this world or the next.”



CHAPTER XVIII

HELEN RANGER recovered. Different people explained her recovery different ways, but whichever explanation was right, the fact remained, she recovered. But none the less, during the days of convalescence, her father lost her, though perhaps not all unwillingly this time.

"I'd sooner it were you, doctor," the old gentleman said, "if she must go; sooner you than any man, and so long as my little girl's happy, why I am."

And happy she evidently was, more especially when Tollinger promised he would not take her too far away.

"Why not settle down at Gainsford?" Luttrell suggested, when the subject was mentioned to him. "They say the old doctor here is anxious to retire; he would sell the practice."

"Wouldn't do," Tollinger answered gloomily, "people don't like me."

"That is only because they have got hold of you the wrong way. It could easily be remedied."

Tollinger did not believe it, but Luttrell did; and he proved the better judge, as the doctor afterwards admitted.

Luttrell did not go away directly after seeing Helen Ranger. At first he could not, he had to conform to the strict regulations laid down by the



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Gainsford authorities, and these kept him virtually a prisoner at the Rangers' for some considerable time. Afterwards, when he might have left, he found several things to keep him in the neighbourhood. Early in his time of quarantine he confessed his deception, as early as he could decently introduce any subject not connected with Helen and her illness. The doctor never could see why he insisted on the confession.

"They won't understand and they won't take it right," he protested.

He had himself come back to his old loyal partisanship of Luttrell, but with the addition that he was almost jealously anxious others should share it. "They are good enough people," he said, "but narrow. I mean they won't take a common-sense practical view."

Luttrell agreed. "Very likely," he said; "but you see, I don't mind that, it is not for them I own up."

"For what, then?"

"For selfish satisfaction."

The doctor snorted; as, more than once before, he did not know how much to believe.

"Anyhow, you are not to tell Helen," he said; and then feeling the advantage of a weighty reason he added, "It will trouble her and be such a shock."

"I will wait till she is fit for the shock," Luttrell returned, "but I shall certainly tell her. Since my motive is selfish satisfaction I shall consider myself and not her."

Tollinger was vexed, but, seeing plainly that he could not prevent the disclosure, he determined to make it himself. It would not hurt Helen to know that her paragon priest was an erring mortal, he never really imagined it would; but he was afraid



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her white inexperience would not judge his friend as he considered he ought to be judged. Accordingly at the earliest opportunity he told the tale himself; and what with the skilfulness of the telling, and the way in which Helen's inexperience had lately been enlightened by that master-teacher, love, he easily persuaded her to an even more liberal view than his own. So, when Luttrell came to confess, he found he had been forestalled and already stripped of his clerical robes but somehow left a hero still.

Mr. and Mrs. Ranger even did not altogether justify Tollinger's fears. They certainly were shocked when Luttrell told them the truth, but not as much as they ought to have been; principally because, by the time he had the opportunity to speak of it, he had been some while in their house, sharing their daily life and anxiety; under which circumstances, as Beatrice had found, it was not so easy to think severely of him. Consequently, as had happened before now, Luttrell did not get all his deserts.

None the less that long quarantine time at the Rangers' was not easy for him. He hated the inactivity and close quarters, and his instinctive desire to please, which kept the fact concealed, made the dislike the stronger. It irked him to be kept prisoner here; there were a dozen things wanting doing. And apart from any real need of action, he was too restless and, for all his genial outside, at heart too solitary a man to take kindly to the necessary arrangement. During these days it was that he heard how affairs had gone with Beatrice while he had been out of England. What he heard did not make it easier to sit by and do nothing. Mr. Ranger told him all the gossip of Gainsford,

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including the little town's surprise when Mrs. Curayl took up the profession of nursing.

"She's back home just now," was his last piece of information. "Oh, no, not here professionally; that wouldn't be quite the thing, we shouldn't any of us like it. She's come to set things straight, I fancy; she has let the house, you know."

"She has let Curayl?" Luttrell repeated. He found it hard to realize she had been compelled to this.

"Yes," Mr. Ranger said, "they do say she tried to sell some of the property separately, but it wouldn't fetch anything. There isn't much of it, you know, and it isn't a particle of good to any one. As it is the new man has taken the lot—no, not bought it outright, got it on a long lease, I have heard; though that is as good as bought it, as far as Mrs. Curayl is concerned; she won't be alive to occupy the old place when the time is up, and unless she marries again there won't be any of the name to come after her either."

Mr. Ranger sighed sympathetically. Luttrell said nothing, sympathetic or otherwise; a little later he asked the name of the man who was coming to Curayl, but Mr. Ranger did not remember it, was not even sure he had ever heard it. Luttrell did his best to refresh his memory both then and later, but to no purpose. He tried to find out from other sources, but unsuccessfully. While he was shut up at the Rangers' he discovered little; he was even denied the small satisfaction of learning the exact details of Beatrice's misfortunes.

September advanced, a very perfect month, with long still days and no feeling of autumn till quite the end. At the end of the month it was said Beatrice was to leave Curayl for

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good and all, and just before the end Gainsford was going to allow those within the Rangers' house to go free. Luttrell looked forward to the time eagerly, though he did not know quite what he was going to do when he got his freedom. Get the new owner of Curayl to reconsider his bargain perhaps—such things were possible with money and persuasion. And afterwards? Probably keep the place for himself; it would be next to impossible to make Beatrice reconsider her decision of leaving the old house. It might perhaps be done if she had no suspicion of his share in the transaction, but it would require an ingenious tale and an intimate knowledge of her affairs. Through those long September days it was Luttrell's great resource to work out this scheme; he was rather good at such things, and in spite of his present experience of the consequences which sometime befall deceivers, he was entirely unhampered by any thought of the complicated deception necessary. What did hamper him was his ignorance of Beatrice's affairs and his knowledge of her clear-sighted honesty, which might be likely to discern things that would be less plain to a more crooked and clever mind. So the scheme he perfected one day he rejected as useless the next, and the end of September came before he had decided on a satisfactory plan.

There was another matter on his mind at that time—Caser's packet still undelivered. He had taken it with him when he went to Africa, confident that this time he had found its right destination; but he had brought it back with him again unopened. He had found Mrs. George Fisher at the address given him and at first felt hopeful about her. She was Mrs. Wythe's grand-daughter, very much ashamed of the connection, and on sufficiently



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bad terms with her relative to justify the belief that the old woman would have been pleased to prevent anything of value coming to her if possible. But beyond that things were not satisfactory. Her sister-in-law had either mistaken or exaggerated the degree of her intimacy with Caser. She had only seen him once, and that when she was a girl of ten ; at the first mention of his name she could not even recall who he was, afterwards she remembered to have seen him at her grandmother's house, though she knew nothing about him. On that occasion, it was true, he had kissed her ; she remembered it, and also that she was very angry because he was so black and ugly. She was perfectly certain he could never have meant to send her anything that cost him risk or trouble, or, indeed, anything at all, he would have forgotten all about her long ago. She held the packet in her hand a moment but returned it unopened ; unlike her grandmother she was strictly honest, and did not attempt to benefit by what she was sure could not be intended for her. Anything so come by would bring a curse, she said ; it was like robbing the dead.

Luttrell, while applauding the sentiment, felt he might possibly have overlooked the transgression, as owing to this honesty he was left with the packet still on his hands and absolutely no idea now as to who should have it. As a last resource he wrote to his solicitors to find out what they could while he was away, but they did not succeed in discovering anything, which was scarcely surprising, since Caser's friends and relatives, if he had any, were not likely to see or answer advertisements. Consequently, on his return to England, he found himself as much in the dark as ever.

He brought the unopened packet with him to



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Gainsford. He had a faint hope at the outset that Tollinger might be able to tell him something. This had long ago been dispelled; in fact he had himself forgotten the matter during the early days of Helen's illness; now, however, that she was recovering and he had long days of enforced idleness, it recurred to him again. He determined to make one last effort before he left Gainsford. He would spend his first day of freedom inquiring in the little town, and also at Curayl. Incidentally, in so doing, he might also learn all that was generally known about Beatrice's affairs, and so perhaps arrive at some conclusion as to how to act with regard to them. This fact may have had something to do with his decision.

The day of freedom came; Luttrell was at last allowed to go where he pleased. But not very early in the day; the local authorities were punctilious, and having inquired at what hour he entered Mr. Ranger's house, said that he might leave it at the same hour a given number of weeks later. It is possible he did not quite fulfil the letter of this law, but it certainly was not till well on in the afternoon that he found himself walking down the quiet sunny streets of Gainsford. He was bound in the first instance for Joe Heward's house; he, it seemed, was one of those who had moved to the little town when evicted from the Waterside.

He must also have moved up in the world, to judge by the style and decent appearance of his new dwelling. So Luttrell thought as he knocked at the door; but when it was opened the mystery was explained, for it was none other than the brisk and cheerful Mrs. Alfred Fisher who stood in the doorway.

"Mrs. Fisher!" Luttrell exclaimed. "You in

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Gainsford? This is capital. The aunt has done her duty then, after all, I suppose?"

Mrs. Fisher beamed, though her voice was sobered to a suitable dolorousness when she said, "Yes, sir, poor Aunt Jane's gone; she died in the winter."

"Dear, dear!" Luttrell murmured with gravity.

"She left her little bit to me and my children," the good woman went on, "but my name ain't Fisher now, sir."

"What! Heward, is it? Better still. I thought when I came to the door my friend Joe must have come into a fortune. He seems to have done better even than that."

The new Mrs. Heward allowed herself to brighten again till she was once more beaming. She invited Luttrell in. He came, and seeing that she had been about to cook Joe's tea when he knocked, he was naturally asked into the kitchen to watch the operation and to wait for Joe's return.

In the kitchen were the youngest Heward and the youngest Fisher, who, fortunately being of the opposite sexes, were on excellent terms. There was also present Mrs. Eliza Stone, an old, old woman with a patient wizened face and pale filmy eyes that could not see much. She, so Mrs. Heward told Luttrell, was part of aunt's legacy.

"They were fellow-servants together, she and aunt, when they were young girls," she explained in a loud aside—"over at Curayl it was. They was always good friends, and when they was both lef' alone in the world they set up house together. Mrs. Stone lost her 'bit o' money years ago, but aunt and she kep' living together just the same. When aunt died she said we was to do the same by the poor soul as she'd done. And quite welcome, too,

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I'm sure ; she don't eat more'n a sparrer and she's wonderful quiet in the ordinary way."

Luttrell's coming must have been out of the ordinary way, for Mrs. Stone was not quiet then. Something set her talking, and curiously enough it was Caser's name. Mrs. Heward spoke it ; she was asking about her sister-in-law, and hearing how little she had really known of the man. At the mention of the name Mrs. Stone's face wakened to interest.

"He was at Curayl," she said, with the suddenness of one wakening from sleep.

Luttrell turned to her at once. "And when was that ?" he asked.

She could not tell exactly, dates did not have much meaning for her, and the events by which she marked her years were all unknown to Luttrell. However, he set himself patiently to draw her out, with the result that he began at last to hear something concerning Caser from one who had known him. It appeared the man had been groom at Curayl for some considerable time, quite when it was impossible to find out, during the Major's lifetime certainly, but a good many years ago. He was a wicked man, Mrs. Stone said, very wicked. She did not specify clearly what form his wickedness took ; she began several tales and wandered away in them, talking vaguely of sayings and doings long forgotten, so that Mrs. Heward, who did not follow, remarked audibly, "Poor old soul, she gets to jabber terrible nonsense."

But Luttrell knew better. He was able to piece out some of the tales told and the charges brought against Caser, and, in a less degree, against Caser's master. Mrs. Stone did not intend to say a word against the Major ; she would not have dreamed of

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even criticizing in the master what she condemned in the man. Luttrell recognized that far more plainly than she did herself, and was more than ever impressed with the strength and the danger of the Curayls' position and tradition, the tradition to which Beatrice had been brought up and by which she had lived.

There was one thing, however, which Mrs. Stone's ramblings did not convey, that was any hint of the required woman. Of Caser's relations she knew nothing, she said he had not any; for friends he seemed to be in like case, and of his loves there seemed to be none in particular: There may have been some one away from Curayl, she said, but she thought not; he was not always there, it was true; he came and went a good deal, but on his master's business, and that, so Luttrell gathered, not always of the most presentable sort. Mrs. Wythe's name was mentioned and the old woman shook her head: "She was a bad lot," she said, "a rare bad lot." When questioned further she said Caser knew her, of course; every one who was bad or wanted anything bad knew her. At least they did long ago. Things were changed now; times were not what they were. Mrs. Wythe must be a very old woman if she wasn't dead. Lord have mercy on her soul."

Luttrell rose. "I wonder if Mrs. Wythe is dead," he said to Mrs. Heward. "If they turned her out of her crazy house and sent her to live somewhere respectable it's likely she would not survive it. I suppose you can't tell me about her?"

"That's just what I can do, sir," Mrs. Heward replied. "They did turn her out, same as they did every one else, and she stopped away for a bit, but she's gone back again now. I don't know when, gettin' on for a month, I dare say, though

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the gentry don't seem to know anythin' about it. Joe says she's gone back to her ole house, and he don't believe they'll get her out without a deal of trouble, though how the pore thing lives it's hard to say."

Luttrell, from his past experience, fancied "the pore thing" was, for her age, wonderfully well fitted to take care of herself. He said something to that effect and added, "I think I will go and see her."

"Now, sir?" Mrs. Heward exclaimed. "Why, it's after half-past six and gettin' on towards dark. It's two good hours to the Waterside, sir, and a nasty lonely walk!"

But none of these facts were likely to deter Luttrell, not even the amount of time to be consumed. It was getting too late to make further calls of inquiry, so to his thinking there could be no better way of spending the hours, and certainly none more to his taste than the long lonely walk. Accordingly he said good-bye to the two women, and without waiting to see Joe set forth at once.



CHAPTER XIX

EDWARD DELMER was a man ill-used by fate. He had felt it several times in his life, but never more than on the day he heard of Sir William Goyte's death. He could not, of course, be sure that he would have made anything out of the great speculator had death been delayed, say, twenty-four hours. But he did feel nearly sure he could have got something from the rich widow had he not unfortunately prejudiced himself in her eyes a short time before her widowhood. He raged somewhat at the unfortunate way things had fallen out, but he did not give up the idea of financial help through Beatrice; the thing in his estimation was delayed, but that was awkward enough. He possessed his share of what Sir William had called the Curayl effrontery—that faculty which made its possessors do or propose what seemed best to them, with a complete unconsciousness of, rather than an indifference to, the way it might strike others. Accordingly he intended, when he had given Beatrice time to get over that mistaken previous visit of his, to apply to her again. She would not, of course, love him the better for the visit; still less would she do so if she happened to know, which was unlikely, of his letter to her husband; but seeing how thoroughly she disliked him before that did not matter much;



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women would often help where they disliked from fear or pride or pity, or some other unfathomable reason—if it did not cost too much.

So Delmer determined to try again, but he did not put the determination into practice quite so soon as he had intended. A stroke of luck supplied him with money through the spring and summer, so it was not till he was in difficulties again in September that he went to Beatrice. He learned she was at Curayl. He did not trouble to make further inquiries about her; the advisability of it and the possibility of her being anything but a rich widow did not occur to him. To Curayl he went—he knew better than to write, this was a matter to be talked over in person—and the day he selected for his going was the day Gainsford allowed Luttrell his liberty again.

Beatrice was alone at Curayl. The gardener's wife was, as before, her only servant; she had no need of others, her days in the old house were few now. She had much to do before she left. The man who had taken the house offered to buy a certain amount of the furniture too; and she was going over everything to see what to sell and what she could best afford to keep. But besides this deciding, there had been much turning out and destroying to do, drawers and cupboards and old cabinets to be ransacked, everything that spoke of the past life of her people to destroy. She neither wished to take with her nor to leave behind for the new-comer any such mementoes. So she had systematically worked downwards through the house, destroying old forgotten memories, relentlessly destroying some little that perhaps might well have been spared, but also a great deal that were better gone now than



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its use and meaning was dead. And all the time there was present with her the feeling which had first come to her when her husband threatened her house in his anger—that the soul and the life of it were fled, and only the old grey husk remained.

She was busy over her work of destruction, now in the library, which she had left till the last, when Delmer came to see her. It was late when he came—after seven o'clock; he had missed a connecting train and been delayed on the journey. But to compensate for that annoyance he was admitted to Beatrice at once. The old woman who opened the door recognized him as a connexion of the family, and remembering how her mistress had seen him before, led him at once to the library and, unordered, laid a place for him at the dinner table.

Beatrice was sitting at the secretaire. She had just opened the first crammed drawer when his name was announced. She turned about sharply and her face did not look a welcome.

Delmer saw it, but was not abashed. "Rather an unreasonable hour for a call, I'm afraid," he said easily, "but I am really not to blame, it is your extraordinary line. I got into the wrong train, and seem to have wandered half over the country before I could get back to the right one."

He seated himself as he spoke and Beatrice said "The trains are rather awkward." Then, having neither time nor inclination for polite conversation with this visitor, she asked: "You wanted to see me on business? It is as well you came to-day and not later. I am leaving Curayl shortly."

"I was surprised to hear you were here," he replied. "I suppose you have not been mourning in this gloomy seclusion all the time?"

"I have not been here long," she said. "I only

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came to set things straight. I have parted with the place."

"Parted with it?" He stared in astonishment; whatever his own feelings he knew how the bearers of the name venerated Curayl. "Sold it!" he exclaimed.

"I have kept the freehold," Beatrice answered, "otherwise, as far as I am concerned, it is to all intents and purposes, sold."

"Why?"

"I wanted money."

Astonishment became something more now, the matter was growing personal to him. "You wanted money—you? Why, Goyte was as rich as Croesus."

"He was a very rich man."

"And he behaved shabbily to you? The black-guard! What an infernal shame! But it's like those monied snobs, they'd take their money to the Pit with them if they could. They're jolly careful to tie it all up so that their widows——"

Beatrice cut him short before he could finish. "My husband was a just and not ungenerous man," she said. "I cannot blame him in the matter."

Delmer had a momentary fear that it was he himself who was to blame, he and his unfortunate letter; but it seemed unlikely, there had been too little time.

"No," Beatrice said, as if she had read part of his thoughts in his face. "I do not think you to blame. I am not even quite certain that you communicated with my husband or that he believed it if you did; in any case you have nothing whatever to do with the present state of affairs."

"I am glad you think so," Delmer said with

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assurance, "because it is true. I would not for a minute have dreamed of really prejudicing you with him, you know that ; it would not be to my advantage any more than yours. I came to you with that tale last autumn, I know, but I was a fool and confoundedly hard up. I never meant to make mischief out of it, especially when I found it was perfectly groundless. The whole matter dropped as far as I was concerned when I left this house."

Beatrice may or may not have believed him ; she gave no sign either way, and after a moment he changed the subject by observing : " You have not quite nothing, I suppose ? Or, at least, a relative nothing, depending on—circumstances ? "

" It does not depend on anything," she answered. " I have not a penny of the money that my husband left. If you do not believe me it is easy for you to find out the truth."

He recognized that, and so against his will was forced to believe her. " What was settled on you ? " he asked.

" Nothing."

" Nothing ! What are you going to do ? "

" Earn my own living as a nurse."

But now at last he saw reason to disbelieve her. " Oh, I say ! " he said, " that won't do, you know. You, a Curayl, earning your living as a nurse or anything else. You don't expect me to believe it, do you ? You are going to live on your savings, sell your jewellery and so on, and you're afraid I want a little help. Isn't that it ? "

" No," she answered indifferently. " I never had any opportunity to amass any savings and I have no jewellery to sell."

" Then you must have played your cards deucedly badly."

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To this she made no reply; no doubt from his point of view it was correct.

"What on earth are you going to do?" he asked again.

"I have told you," she answered.

"But what am I to do?" he demanded, with almost unconscious frankness.

"You?" she inquired. Clearly she did not see that he was concerned in the matter.

But he did. "Of course I am concerned," he said, "just as much as our father would have been if he had been alive. You don't think he arranged that marriage for your benefit only? Look here, we may as well speak plainly about things, and not fool about any more. You didn't marry Goyte for tender and disinterested love, you married him for money; and our respected father, who had as keen an eye to the main chance as any one I ever met, ran the marriage through with a purpose. That purpose was not only that you should be provided for, the fond parent wasn't a part he ever pretended to play; he didn't mean you to be the only gainer; he meant us all to profit by the golden calf, me as well as you, and himself more than either. And I say it is my concern, very much my concern, if you have played your cards so infernally badly as to get nothing for any of us out of it. I want my share of the loot, and if I don't get it I think I have a right to feel pretty badly used."

So he explained his standpoint, and Beatrice listened silently. What he said was in a measure false, yet true enough to bring home to her the sordidness of her bargain as it had not been brought before. She looked across at Delmer, the man for whom, even in unconscious girlhood, she had felt an instinctive moral repulsion, and knew that by



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her own act she stood down on a level with him, and had given him something of a right to speak as if they were brother thieves quarrelling over the spoil of the dead. Still, in the one particular that mattered just now his words were not quite correct. She answered that one point only.

"Whatever may have been my father's motive," she said, "I can assure you you did not enter into his consideration. He——"

"Would have left me money if he had had any to leave," Delmer said. "You said so last time I saw you."

"I meant," she answered, "that had he left me money I should have given you a share because I do not think he treated you fairly. He never expressed any such wish, you should have known him better than to imagine he would."

Delmer appeared to be convinced; but with a suddenness that was suspicious. "He was an unforgiving old fellow," he said, somewhat pensively. "I was a bit wild, I own, but he wasn't exactly a saint himself; he might have overlooked it at the last. Didn't he even speak of me?"

It did not occur to Beatrice to wonder why these feelings were expressed now, and not when her father's death was spoken of at their last meeting; she only felt sorry she was obliged to answer "No." To soften the word, she added, "He was not able to speak at the last."

Delmer sighed. "Didn't he mention any little keepsake he wanted me to have?" he asked.

She shook her head. Since that was the motive of the inquiry there did not seem any need to soften the answer, and Delmer went on:

;"A bit hard of him, but I suppose it was his way."



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He used to be decent to me long ago, I can't forget that. I should like to have some trifle for old sake's sake."

Beatrice's lips set in a straight line ; she might have known he was leading up to that trifle.

"What do you want ?" she asked, not trusting herself to say more.

He hesitated as if deciding, but it was only part of his plan ; he had, no doubt, made up his mind before he began.

"There was a little portrait of him," he said, "a small miniature on ivory——"

"That was my mother's."

He laughed. "It was my mother's before it was yours."

She could not believe him. "My mother's portrait was at the back," she said.

"That's very likely ; my mother's was once upon a time ; it was like our respected parent to take out his mistress and put in his wife, or even put her on top. I dare say if you were to take the thing to pieces you would find my mother underneath yours : her portrait was only a sketch on paper, a miniature could easily be put in front of it."

"I do not believe it," Beatrice repeated, but in her heart she was not quite sure, she knew her father so well, so horribly well. She remembered her mother telling her that the ornament was a birthday gift, it had not been given at the time of the marriage ; not until such a time as Delmer would have been old enough to notice, and perhaps remember it if it had been in his mother's keeping till then.

Two things, however, were unexplained. Why should the Major give so handsome a present, the thing with its jewelled setting was worth a lot, to a woman he did not marry ? And why had she given



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it back? The two points seemed to her rather difficult, but Delmer explained them.

"My mother," he said, "was a danseuse, an exceedingly pretty woman. She was the rage at one time, I believe; it was the fashion to give her presents. Our father, as you know, was always in the fashion, no matter what it cost him—or anybody else—most usually 'anybody else'—consequently he, like others, gave my mother a present, and of course took care to go one better than his friends and make his present one of the most valuable she received. As to why she gave it back, there you beat me. I never can make out why she cared for him, but she did; and when she found he was sick of her she was furious. I remember the night well, though I was very young at the time; she was frantic with rage and grief, real howling, weeping grief. The old devil wasn't worth it a bit in the world, but there it was. She had kept her hold, such as it was, on him for a long time, quite a number of years. She was very good company, I believe, as well as pretty, and she didn't plague him or see him too often. But in the end, of course, he got sick of her; one always—I mean, she found it out and, as I say, played the fool about it, and having cried all night, wrote to him in the morning. A pretty stiff letter, I dare say, though it would not make any impression on him, and sent back his presents including the miniature."

Beatrice listened. It was an ugly tale, and not the least ugly part was the man's callousness; the folly of his mother's act was evidently much more in his mind than the cruelty of his father's. She saw that quite plainly, and was by it almost convinced that his tale was true.

"But even if it is," she said, "even if all you tell me is true——"



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"It makes this difference," Delmer cut in, "the miniature is mine by right. I didn't intend to claim it on those grounds; I would have spared you this choice little tale if you had given it up quietly, out of your bounty. But since you wouldn't, you had to hear that it was mine by right, and I'm not asking for your charity, merely claiming what is mine."

"It belonged to my mother last," Beatrice said; "that is, if it ever did belong to anybody else. It was given to my mother and she gave it to me. I do not recognize your right to it. But in any case"—and she checked him as he was about to speak—"in any case it does not matter. I have neither the portrait nor its setting."

"Have you not?" he said and smiled. "Where is it?" he asked with interest.

Not a year ago another man had asked the same question and got no answer from Beatrice; but this case was different, it was needless to screen the dead man from his son's judgment, there was no use for the pitiful pretence now.

"My father had it," she said.

Delmer nodded as if the answer was what he expected. "And sold it?" he inquired.

"I don't know. I suppose so."

"You don't know? Then I can tell you I happen to know quite a lot about it. I heard from Runet—you remember Runet?"

She did very well: he was her father's valet, an unprincipled but obliging Frenchman, who, in common with others, served the Major better than he deserved. On his master's death he had gone back to Paris, and there Delmer had met him this summer, and from him heard enough of the miniature to induce him to make this belated application for a keepsake when it seemed there was nothing else to be got.

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"Certainly, I remember the man," Beatrice said, "but I do not know what he has to do with it."

Delmer laughed, a pleased little laugh that for a moment recalled her father to Beatrice's mind.

"Allow me to congratulate you," he said. "Our respected father need never have been ashamed of his daughter, at least. As a liar,—no, pardon—as a raconteur, you rival him. I believe you would have deceived him. You certainly would have deceived me had I not excellent reasons for knowing better."

Beatrice flushed, but she was not betrayed into any verbal expression of anger. "It would perhaps be as well if you were to explain your meaning," she said.

"Perhaps it would," Delmer agreed. "I will tell you the tale as I had it from Runet. It seems that our grasping parent had the miniature, as he had everything else of value upon which he could lay hands. He fully intended to realize upon it. Runet had news that he, as usual, was to have the disposal of it. However, it never got so far as that, for it was stolen while it was still in the old man's possession. It happened at Vienna, not so many months before he died; a fellow, who said he was an old servant, somehow got an interview with him, saw it—I suppose he had it out for some purpose or other—and deliberately took it by force from under the old chap's nose. Runet was listening outside the door. I don't know why he didn't interfere, he was not often nonplussed, but he may have been that time; certainly he never was specially valiant. The rascal's account was ripping—it must have been worth a trifle to see our cool and well-bred parent done for once! He was devilish clever, but it seems he was worsted by the frank brute violence of his quondam half-caste groom——"

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"What groom?" Beatrice asked.

"Oh, you don't even know that!" Delmer said with irritation; then—"What on earth's the good of keeping up the pretence still?" he asked.

"What groom?" Beatrice repeated. "The only man I can remember in our service at all answering to the description of half-caste was Caser—he had a little black blood, I believe. But we lost sight of him years ago, and I should not think he was at all likely to do such a thing as you describe."

"You have a high opinion of him?" Delmer asked. "The sentiment seems to have been mutual, for it was for you he stole the miniature."

"For me?"

"So he said. Runet heard him tell the old man that it was yours, and he had no right to it. The fellow knew him well, and so could guess how he came by the ornament, and what he was going to do with it, and he talked to him with a vulgar simplicity which must have shocked the old boy's refined taste. Then he took the miniature and said he was going to return it to you, to whom it belonged, and who alone should have it so long as he was doomed to be on this sanguinary earth. That is a revised version of what he is reported to have said; perhaps he treated you to the original."

"I know nothing whatever about it," Beatrice said. "I have never seen the man, or heard of him either, until to-day, since he left our service."

Which was true, for she had never heard his name at the Waterside. He was dead long before she went there, and was only once vaguely mentioned in her presence as the stranger who had brought the fever. But Delmer did not believe her, he smiled sceptically.

"He wasn't handsome certainly," he remarked. "I rather wonder at your fancy—there you do not



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do credit to our father, his taste in such things was irreproachable."

Beatrice rose. "I must ask you either to refrain from insulting me too baldly or else to go," she said.

But Delmer was not nettled, he looked at her with lazy admiration. "Anger becomes you," he said, "but in spite of my appreciation of your looks I will oblige you and go as soon as ever you produce the miniature."

"I told you at the outset I have not got it."

"I know you did; that was before you knew how much I knew."

Beatrice turned away impatiently. "It scarcely seems worth while repeating that I have not got it," she said. "I have nothing else to say, and no means of convincing you of the truth of that."

"There are several things you might advance in support of your word," Delmer suggested; "for instance, you might say the fellow Caser was not fond of you."

"That would not be true. I think he was fond of me in his way; he certainly was very good to me when I was a child, very kind indeed. It was he who taught me to ride and who gave me my first puppy—that was soon after my mother died."

Her voice grew gentle, almost as if she were recalling the last occurrence for herself, not her listener. She remembered every detail of it very distinctly: the man taking her to see the litter of young puppies in the stable, and her own wordless agony of grief at the sight of the dog-mother's affection. He must have seen her anguish though she strove to hide it, for he tried to divert her attention. He took the handsomest puppy and thrust it into her arms, and afterwards talked fast of all

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manner of things to distract her attention. It was then that he had admired the ornament which she had hung round her neck. The ornament ! It was the miniature framed in its glittering setting of jewels. She had hung it by a ribbon so that it dangled on her black frock with a child's disregard for incongruity. The man had noticed it and called it a pretty thing to please her ; poor blundering fellow, not knowing that in his efforts to distract her thoughts from her sorrow he was stumbling back on it. She remembered that she had told him how she came by it, saying with quivering lips that it was her mother's parting gift to her. He had been moved at the time, but surely after all these years he had forgotten !

"You might also suggest," Delmer's voice broke in on her thoughts, "that Caser did not know enough about our respected father to guess for what purpose he had the miniature. That would not be true either, seeing that we both know Caser jackalled the old man till he knew too much of his master, or some one else knew too much of him, when he was obliged to depart hastily. There are other things you might suggest, also not true, but you might say them if you like."

"I have nothing to say. I can only repeat that Caser did not bring the miniature to me. I have neither seen nor heard of him for years."

Delmer nodded. "That's the best rôle to take up," he said. "It is unlikely that he should have brought it, isn't it ? In the first place the old man might have prevented him by setting the police on his track and reclaiming the thing as his. I don't know why he did not."

Beatrice did, or at least she could guess but she did not say, and Delmer went on nonchalantly :



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"In the second place it seems unnatural that a man of that sort, a thorough-paced rascal, should do so much for a woman like you. He was hard up, too; he might have sold the thing for his own benefit. Only he didn't, he brought it to you. Oh, you needn't deny it, I can give you something near the date even. It was last summer. That was a good while after the old man's death, you say? That's true. Caser was in difficulties of some sort and could not get to England before, but last summer he came in a little tramp cargo steamer and was landed, with the cargo, not twenty miles from here."

"Last summer I was first in London and then in Devonshire. It was not till August that I came here."

Delmer smiled derisively. "I suppose it would have been impossible for Caser to have followed you," he said, "or even waited about here till you came? It was pretty late in the summer before he arrived, he would not have had long to wait. What's the good of fooling any more? I have the greatest respect for your abilities as a liar, but you can't make a good job of this. I know Caser had the miniature, I know that he kept it, like an idiot, till he could personally give it to you; and I know that he set out for this part of the country last summer. Runet knew something of the man and can swear to it; and I, not believing entirely in Runet's oaths, verified some of his statements. Consequently"—and he held out his hand—"my miniature, if you please."

"*Your* miniature?"

The scorn that had been so long hidden and the anger that had leapt up to be crushed down so often at last found escape, and seemed somehow to gather in the one low-spoken emphatic word. It was a concentrated disdain, the disdain that draws away

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its skirts and scarcely condescends to look from under lowered eyelids at its object.

Delmer sprang to his feet; nothing the tone implied was lost on him. "Yes, mine," he said; "mine, mine, mine, and not yours, most sacred product of holy wedlock and participator in a similar rotten sham! I say the thing is mine and I will have it. By God, if you don't give it to me I will take it for myself!"

"You will break into my house and try to steal it like a common thief?" There was icy anger in her tone. "Yes? Then if you meet with the fate of a common thief do not be surprised."

Delmer laughed contemptuously. "One Curayl prosecuting the other for housebreaking!" he said, "or shooting the other in self-defence! A fitting end to this noble family."

"Since when have you been a Curayl?"

The moment the words were spoken she repented the meanness of them, feeling herself a hundred times degraded by them.

But instantly he seized the opportunity they offered. "Since the day that my father——"

She turned away; the colour, for all her self-control, mounting faintly even to her white forehead at the unutterable coarseness of his words, and the feeling that she had lain herself open to them; even, by her own unholy marriage, put herself not far from the level of the man who uttered them.

She opened the door. "Go!" she said.

"Not without my property."

She went out into the hall; a heavy dog whip lay with other unused things on a stone table. She took it and went back to the threshold of the room. "Now, go!" she repeated, drawing it slowly through her hands.



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She was a tall, powerfully built woman and she was very angry. Doubtless if it had come to a struggle he would have mastered her, but there certainly would have been an ugly struggle first.

He rose, very well aware that there were things more repellent to her than using the whip under the circumstances. "You mean it?" he said. "You want me to go? You think I can't do any harm now your husband's dead without finding your liaisons out? Very well, as you wish; but remember 'when knaves fall out'—the Curayls, or even the bastard Curayls, are better holding together. Good-bye, for the present."

And he went out. Soon afterwards he was driving away, not in the direction of Gainsford but to the deserted Waterside.



CHAPTER XX

THE Waterside houses showed dark against the lesser darkness of the sky. From a distance the place looked to Luttrell not very different to what it had done last year, excepting only that there were now no lights visible. But as he drew nearer he felt a difference: there was an intense silence everywhere, and a sense of desolation such as was not to be found on the solitary marsh. On his way he had seen few people, during the last miles no one at all. Once an empty carriage had met and passed him; he had not noticed it particularly, and after that he had the track to himself. On either side the silent marshland, dim curves of darkness streaked with bars of mist, very still and full of pleasant damp odours, under a wide starry sky. In time he reached the deserted settlement, and the companionable solitude gave place to desolation, as, in the shadow of the houses, starlight gave place to a real dark. Nature holds nothing that for loneliness can compare with a place where men have lived and from whence they have gone away.

Luttrell as he drew near noticed how the houses were falling to decay. On his left stood the cottage where he himself had lived—where Beatrice had lived. A window had been broken in; through the gap he could see a square of darkness, the little room



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where they had sat on an evening not to be forgotten. Farther up the road was a house with shutters left unfastened ; one had partly dropped from its hinges and hung outwards, all aslant, ready to fall in the first gale. He stood a moment in the shadow of the familiar doorway, looking straight before him. While he stood there a sound broke the ghostly silence, it was as if a door not far off slammed noisily. Now this was strange, for the evening was still with the wonderful windless stillness to be found in autumn ; but something else followed—steps, quick and decided, of well shod feet which were coming that way. Luttrell drew further into the shadow, and almost immediately a man passed him, going fast and looking neither to right nor left. It was impossible to see more than an outline, but Luttrell was practically certain, from what he did see, from the sound of the steps and the manner of moving, that this was no tramp or gipsy, such as might have made a resting place among the deserted houses ; the man, whoever he was, seemed as if he were there of a set purpose, and was going away with business of his own. Luttrell came out of the shadow and looked after him ; he had half a mind to follow and see where he went, though of course it was no affair of his. That consideration never deterred him, and he hesitated for a full minute before he turned about and went on his own way again, reflecting that if the man had come on business it must have been with Mrs. Wythe, for there was no one else there.

Mrs. Wythe's house alone at the Waterside showed a light, but seeing that the window looked on to her encumbered yard it was not visible until the archway was passed. Luttrell knocked at the door nearest the light and waited.

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A feeble voice, but one raspy with anger, answered him. "You needn't come back," it said, "you'll take nothin' by it!"

Luttrell, as if he considered this permission enough, lifted the latch and walked in. The room within was much as he had seen it when he was last there. Mrs. Wythe had moved with all her property when, unpermitted, she came back to her old home to die. It was to die that she had come; it was plainly written on her face, on her little shrunken body, even in her glitteringly bright eyes. She was sitting huddled up in a big chair; on a table beside her stood a lighted candle and other things she thought she might need; it is possible she recognized she might be too feeble to fetch them when she wanted them.

She looked sharply at Luttrell as he entered. "Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, with the snarl gone from her voice. "I thought it was him back again."

"The man who has just gone?" Luttrell asked. "I don't think he'll come back to-night, he has set off down the road at a great pace."

"You met him? You saw him? Then you've seen a Fool—d'ye hear? You've seen a FOOL!"

"I have seen them before," Luttrell said, "dozens of them. I have a brotherly feeling for them."

Mrs. Wythe paid no attention. She muttered to herself; then she said aloud with a little laugh, as if it amused her—"He threatened me! He! I wonder what he thought he'd take by that!"

"Not much, if he was not too angry to think," Luttrell remarked.

"He couldn't buy it, or wheedle it, he found, so he thought he'd bully it," the old woman said. "A better man 'n he tried all that long ago. 'Tisn't likely he could do what his father couldn't."

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She laughed again, and then fell to shivering so that her teeth chattered together.

"You'd be better in bed," Luttrell said, watching her. "I'm afraid you're not quite the thing to-night."

"No, mister, I'm not," she answered between the shivering, "and shan't be, what's more. It's a killin' complaint I've got—old age, it's called; there ain't much that's good for it."

"What about a fire?" Luttrell suggested, looking at the rubbish-choked hearth. "You'd feel better if you were warmer. I tell you what, I'll light a fire in the room upstairs where the big bed used to be, then you can lie there. If you were covered up you would be warmer."

"I shan't get warm this side the grave," she answered shortly, "and I don't want to. You leave me be. I'm dyin'—I know it; but I'm goin' to do it my own way and in peace. I've been alone most of my life, 't isn't likely I want any one botherin' round now."

"No," Luttrell said, "no, probably not; still, you may as well be alone in bed as out of it."

With that he set about lighting the fire in the upper room where the sea chest stood. When he had got it well burning he carried the old woman up, laid her on the big bed and covered her with a quilt. She resented it, but not much; she was very weak and tired.

"Let's have an orgy," Luttrell said, as he filled a stone jar with water and put it to her feet. "I see you have got some spirits here; well, I've got some hot water; a glass won't be hard to find."

Mrs. Wythe muttered something, but she did not refuse the glass when he offered it to her.

"You're a sportsman," she said as she drank it.

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"I said so last time you came. You'd behave like a gentleman, not mess things up as he does."

Luttrell did not know who the he in question was, and Mrs. Wythe did not inform him; instead she asked suddenly—"Have you found Caser's woman yet?"

"No," he answered, "that is why I came to you this evening. I have found out a good lot, but not the lady in question. I thought perhaps if we talked things over again, as once before, I might learn something useful now."

"I can't be bothered with lies to-night," Mrs. Wythe said wearily; "you can have the truth if you like; you'd never ha' found it out for yourself"—she seemed almost triumphant at the idea—"so I'll tell you now. That thing you've got—dunno what it is—somethin' he set store by anyhow, is meant for her they call Mrs. Curayl."

"Mrs. Curayl?" Luttrell repeated in astonishment.

"Yes, he said so more'n once. She wasn't hereabouts when he first came and he was took ill almost directly, so he didn't know when she did come. If he'd known he'd a sent for her, or tried to, and you'd ha' never got it at all, which would ha' been a pity; you've had some run for your money, huntin' all over the place for the woman, while all the time you'd been in housekeepin' with her and might ha' given it to her any day."

"Do you mean that it is really Mrs. Curayl?" Luttrell said. He found it hard to believe.

"Yes, I do," Mrs. Wythe said shortly, and shut her mouth as if she meant to say no more. But after a minute she spoke again. "Here, mister," she said, "will you get somethin' for me? I'm not as nimble as I was."

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Luttrell professed his readiness, and she gave him instructions to open one of the chests that stood against the wall. It took time, for it was locked and corded too, and when he finally raised the lid it seemed to him that there was nothing but clothes within.

"There's a lilac print," the old woman said. "Fetch me that." Luttrell stirred among the things till he found the required garment. He brought it to the bed, and the old woman felt over the still starched folds till from somewhere in the hem she drew out a long envelope. It was dirty and shabby from years and handling, but it seemed to be what she wanted, for after satisfying herself as to its contents, she gave it to Luttrell.

"Burn it," she said. "Stick it in the fire and burn it right up."

Luttrell obeyed her, and she raised herself on one elbow to watch the leaping flame. When it had died down she said—"Poke it, stir it, knock the ash to pieces!"

Luttrell did so, and she seemed satisfied. "There," she said, apostrophizing some one not present, "there, Master Fool, is what you came bullyin' me for! He'd a took it by force," she went on to Luttrell, "that is, if he could a found it. He had a look, but to no purpose. In the end he came near believin' me when I said I kep' it with my money in some safer place'n this crazy house—and there it is in the fire and an end to his doin's. He can't do nothin' without it, he don't know enough; I'm the only one that does, and I'm dyin'. He may tell every one he likes that the Major had another wife livin' when he married me fine lady's mother, but who'll believe him? No one who knew the old fox."

The spirit must have mounted to Mrs. Wythe's

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usually steady head, to make her thus communicative beyond her wont. Luttrell was not sure that he ought to take advantage of it, yet he did, for this matter seemed one which might touch Beatrice nearly.

"He was young when he did it," the old woman went on. "If it had been a year later it would ha' been a very different matter. I know that; I managed it, and I ain't a fool. He married her, and I kep' the certificate; she didn't know what it was worth, silly fool. She never made a penny out of it, though she and her baby didn't die till after me fine lady was born. But I made somethin': I've lived on it. I didn't sell it outright, I knew better'n that; but I didn't make all I might out of it neither, I liked him too well for that—he was a gentleman. He paid up when he found he'd got to,—just a livin', I didn't ask more—never a wry word over it. He knew when he was beat, and he knew how to make use of the one that beat him. We was friends right to the end. He was a good loser, he was."

"Do you mean to say," Luttrell demanded, "that Mrs. Curayl has no right to her name or house or any of the traditions she values so much?"

"That's what Fool Delmer's goin' to tell her," Mrs. Wythe answered. Beatrice and her feeling and position in the matter did not seem to enter into her thoughts.

"He'll tell her, and when she says 'Prove it,' he can't, not if he tries for ten years."

"But she," Luttrell said, "what will she do?"

"Nothin'; she won't do nothin' anyhow. She's no good. I never went to her with the thing myself. I had enough to live on for one thing, and anyhow she wouldn't ha' given anythin'. If the Fool thinks he's goin' to make anythin' out of it he's wrong.

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But I don't think he does ; he wants to pay her out, that's all. And he can't even do that—we've seen to that, we have."

And she laughed, a faint echo of her old malevolent laugh. But Luttrell broke the gray ash to smaller powder with unnecessary violence. He was very far from sure that Beatrice could not be paid out very effectively in spite of this dust.

"I hope to Heaven nobody will ever ask me anything about this miserable business," he said.

The old woman eyed him keenly. The effect of the spirit was passing off ; reaction had set in, and with it great weakness ; still her brain was brilliantly clear, and she began to fear that her boastings might possibly under some circumstances defeat her own ends.

"If they ask you," she whispered hoarsely, "you shall tell the truth. I'll tell it you whole, as no livin' soul knew it—not even the Major."

She beckoned him nearer and he came almost involuntarily. She made a supreme effort to master the momentarily increasing weakness. "It is all a lie," she whispered triumphantly. "The marriage was a lie and the certificate—not worth the ink—I took him in ; I deceived him ! Yes, all those years—the only one that ever did !"

Her voice failed, but the triumph remained in her eyes. Luttrell stood looking at her, not knowing what to think ; three-quarters convinced, yet not quite certain what to believe ; the evidence for either side was equal, and as for her word—truly she was the queen of liars.

But liar and rogue and whatever else she may have been, she was now a very feeble old woman lying at death's door. He could not leave her in this condition, no matter what she had done or been.



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He did what he could to restore animation, then he packed up the fire to burn for some time.

"Tollinger is at Gainsford," he said. "I am going to fetch him to you."

She roused herself, spurred to the effort by anger. "I won't see him," she whispered. "Do you hear? I won't see him. I will be left alone. I'll die in peace. Are you a fool too that you think one can't die alone?"

Now the feeling that prompted this desire was just the thing Luttrell could understand. It was primitive, of course, almost an animal's instinct to creep away and die apart from its kind; but it seemed to him to have something of rude courage and even dignity, at all events to be natural and fitting enough to this old gipsy woman with her knowledge-begotten contempt for mankind.

"Tollinger shan't stay," he said. "I will bring him, but I will take him away again. He shall do what he can, then we will leave you, and I will come again in the morning. I promise you you shan't be moved to the Cottage Hospital or Infirmary or anything of that sort. Don't you believe me?"

"You leave me alone," she returned with what sharpness she could. "You go to Curayl, that's what you do. Go with the tale I told you. Delmer's gone there with his tale. She's alone there"—she added this in a significant whisper. "He's mad with her. Go and tell your tale and spoil his game. Be quick, he's got a long start."

So it was to Curayl he was going, that man who went from the Waterside so fast. Certainly he had a good start and an easy arrival, if he maintained his pace and did not lose his way in the dark. Luttrell was ready to call himself a fool for not having followed; then he remembered it would have

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been no use, without his present knowledge he could have done nothing. And with it? Not much. For a moment he hesitated between the feeble old woman, who refused any one's help, and Beatrice Curayl, who would probably refuse his. Then he compromised—he would send Tollinger to Mrs. Wythe. He scribbled a note on the blank sheet of a letter he had in his pocket. He knew Tollinger so well, it was easy to frame an appeal that would send him to the deserted settlement and yet ensure his fulfilling that promise to let the old woman die her own way.

"I am going to send a messenger to Dr. Tollinger," he said as he folded the paper. "I shall find some one in Curayl village to go. He will come to see you, but it will be just as I said: you shall be left here alone, and in the morning I will come and see you."

"You mind your own business," she snarled.

"Too old to learn so new a trade," he said. "You ought to be glad of Tollinger; without his help I doubt if you would live till to-morrow to hear what I do at Curayl. Good-night!" And he opened the door.

She grinned. This was a reason to appeal to her, though she suspected why he used it now. "Good-bye, mister," she whispered in an almost friendly tone.

"Good-night," he said again; then went out, shutting the door after him.

And she was left listening to the sound of his steps; listening till the last echo died away, swallowed in the great silence, and her face relaxed, for she was alone even as she had wished.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEATRICE sat in the library, still busy at the secretaire, which she had begun to examine when Delmer came that afternoon. She was not finished yet, although it was half-past nine; every drawer seemed crammed with letters. A fire burned on the hearth, though more for the convenience of burning letters than for warmth, for the window stood wide open, letting in the pleasant damp smelling air that she loved so well and would soon leave for ever. The library was at the back of the house; it was very quiet, though for that matter every part was. The old woman, the only other occupant besides herself, had already gone to bed.

She opened another drawer and took out the first bundle of papers; then stopped, for a sudden noise broke the stillness. It was the ringing of a bell not far off; loud and almost ominous it sounded in the silence, the big-bronze bell which had been affixed to the chief door of the house long ago. It had not been used for years; there were more modern contrivances, sounding only in the deserted servants' quarters. Who could have rung it now?

Beatrice rose and, taking one of the silver candelabra, went out. Into the smaller hall first, then across it and by a passage to the great stone hall, where her



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candles made an oasis of light in a desert of gloom, and her footsteps sounded hollowly in the stillness. She came to the deep set door, but instead of opening it, paused. She was not a timid woman, nor was she a cautious one; to reconnoitre was as foreign to her nature as to temporize or to deceive, but she was virtually alone in this great old house. Something in the gloom of the mediaeval hall, or in the tone of the bell awakened thus suddenly after its years of dumbness, made her nervous and gave her caution new to her.

She set down the candelabra and found her way to an embrasure from whence a stair led to a little room above the door. She went up in the dark; it were wiser to leave the light in the hall, no gleam would show by the door, and did she carry it with her it might flash inadvertently from an unshuttered window. She came to the little room, and drawing back the curtain looked out. There was no one below—no one to right or left, no one anywhere to be seen in the soft hazy night. She went down again, puzzled, and, opening the great door, looked out. But still there was no one to be seen, neither sign nor sound—and yet the bell had rung! For an instant she stood doubtful, almost awed; it seemed to her as if it must have rung of its own accord, a parting knell for Curayl.

More troubled than she would have cared to admit she went back to the library; but there all such ideas fled and the mystery explained itself, for, seated in an armchair by the fire, was Delmer. It did not need the stone dust on his clothes to tell her the trick by which he had entered. Clearly he had climbed in through the window while she went to seek an explanation of the ringing of the bell.

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She stopped on the threshold in sheer amazement, and he looked round.

"Well, my sister," he said, "you don't seem delighted to see me again so soon."

She made no answer at all but glanced at the secretaire as if to assure herself there was nothing of value within reach, then turned to go again.

Delmer sprang to his feet and also made for the door, managing, since she would not condescend to flight, to catch the door as she was shutting it.

"I have not come for my miniature this time," he said, laughing a little as he put his foot against the jamb. "There is no need for haste, it is to give that I have come. I have got a bit of information for you, something I have long suspected though never been able to locate till to-night."

"It must keep until to-morrow," Beatrice answered. She bitterly regretted her failure to close the door. Had she succeeded, he must either have spent the night harmlessly in the library or else gone out the way he came. Doors in that house were not to be broken open easily. But she had failed, and it was useless to leave him standing here.

"If," she said, "you have something you wish to communicate you must write it either to me or to my solicitors. After what passed this afternoon you cannot expect me to receive you."

Delmer seemed as much amused as annoyed. "It isn't exactly a thing to tell your solicitors," he said. "It concerns our father—a little matter which cost him a good deal during his lifetime—about the only one of his doings he had to pay for in hard cash."

"I have no wish to hear it," Beatrice said coldly.

"That I can well believe; you naturally don't

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want to hear how much—or how little—of a Curayl you are.”

The words arrested Beatrice, as they were meant to. “What do you mean?” she said in a new tone.

“What I say. You are no more and no less of a Curayl than I am. Oh, the house is yours, I dare say; the old man most likely took care to make it, he knew accidents will happen. But as to the name, and all the rest of it, you have no more right to it than I have, my lady sister. That’s my information. I’ll tell it to your solicitors if you prefer it.”

Beatrice set down the candelabra she still held: “I do not believe you,” she said as steadily as she could.

“Of course not,” Delmer answered, taking up the light and throwing wide the library door as if he expected her to walk in. “If I’d thought you would believe it I could have told you this much some time ago. It was only to-night I was able to get hold of the more I wanted. I warned you not to quarrel with me this afternoon, didn’t I? When the Curayls fall out, you know, honest men may come by their due. You were too magnificent altogether this afternoon. I thought you ought to have the details, so I got them—you can get them first hand if you like. There is an old woman who lives not far from here can give you all you want. Our father paid her a good deal not to give them while he was alive. As you know he was not a man to pay for nothing—or something either, if he could get out of it.”

Beatrice had followed him into the room as he had anticipated. “Who is this woman?” she asked, ignoring all but this one essential in his speech.

“A Mrs. Wythe,” he answered. “She lives in one of your cottages by the Waterside.”

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"Those cottages are all empty ; no one lives there now."

"No one but her. She has come back unknown to you."

"And she told you that my mother—that I——"

Her voice faded into nothing, and she stood regarding him with eyes that were afraid to ask the truth.

"She told me," Delmer replied, "that your parents were married with all due pomp and ceremony, but without troubling to make sure of the decease of the first Mrs. Curayl, who disobligingly lived on several years."

"It cannot be true," Beatrice said. "It is impossible."

"So I thought," Delmer rejoined, "until I knew Mrs. Wythe, and the hand she had in the business ; then it did not seem in the least impossible, she would be a match for the devil—or our respected father."

Beatrice sat down, and for a little said nothing. She did not ask for proof ; to-morrow, doubtless, she would remember to do so ; to-night the thing was too overwhelming and, for the moment, too convincing. She sat quite still, reviewing many things and for a time almost forgetting Delmer's presence. At last something recalled it to her, and looking up she asked :

"What do you want ? Why have you come to me with this tale ?"

"Well," he answered slowly, and, as if he relished the situation, "my motives are mixed. In the first place, as I told you, I thought the truth would be good for you and for me. You threatened me with the whip to-day and ordered me out of the house, besides saying sundry things about my parentage, all of which apply to your own by the way."

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She bit her lip and said nothing, and he went on :
“ I thought we could talk better about the miniature and everything else if you understood the situation, that we were on the same level—you are on the same level as me, precisely the same as I am——”

“ Hardly that,” she said, and the old disdain rang in her voice. “ No one need be a scoundrel against his will.”

Delmer flushed angrily, but before he could speak she had risen.

“ You have told your tale,” she said, “ and taken what vengeance you can. There is no reason for you to stay. If you will not go, I must.”

She moved to the door as she spoke, this time more quickly ; but she had not quite reached it when she was stopped suddenly, not by Delmer this time but by something she saw at the open window. From the misty night it looked in, a face taking shape out of the darkness ; eyes looking into hers with a question, the same eyes that had looked up from a cottage stair one dawn not to be forgotten. She turned white and swayed a little, but Delmer did not see ; he had risen, but his back was towards the window ! “ Look here, my handsome sister,” he said. “ By Jove, you are handsome when you are angry ! For two pins I’d kiss you, though you are my sister.”

He caught Beatrice by the wrist, probably with no other idea than of preventing her reaching the door, but there was insolent admiration in his face. The man at the window climbed on to the sill.

“ May I come in ? ” he said, and dropped to the floor without waiting for permission.

Delmer faced round with an exclamation, but Beatrice sat down quickly, her face grey and her breath coming short. For a minute or two she hardly knew what passed. Vaguely she heard

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Delmer demand, "Who the devil are you?" and Luttrell answer in the old easy tone—as if nothing mattered very much—"A friend of Mrs. Wythe's. She sent me after you with a few more details for the tale you have been telling."

"It's a lie!" Delmer said angrily. "You don't know Mrs. Wythe or anything about it!"

"Pardon me, but I do; I know quite a lot. I can tell you among other things what has become of a certificate you want—not a real certificate only a forgery; still I believe you are in want of it."

Again Delmer said it was a lie; then he turned to Beatrice—her pride might be useful here. "Do you want this fellow, whoever he may be, mixed up in our concerns—about as shady a concern as ever our name was in?"

Luttrell answered for her. "I am sure Mrs. Curayl does not wish it," he said. "She, more than any of us, must regret this unfortunate washing of the family linen. Still, since the things are in the tub, wouldn't it be as well if we turned up our sleeves and went into the business properly?"

He looked across at Beatrice and she nodded: "Go on," she said, "tell what you have got to."

Luttrell acted on the permission and told all he had heard from Mrs. Wythe, including the destruction of the certificate, her declaration that it was a forgery, and her confession of her double deception of the astute Major. Delmer did not believe him and he said so. He also said a good many other things that might have been left unsaid, and he said them in a way that fully justified his father's strictures on his want of taste.

Luttrell pointed out, always in the same pleasant way, that it was scarcely important what Delmer believed, seeing that nothing could be done either

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way and nothing proved now. The best evidence against one tale applied equally to the other ; so, he said, one must believe which one chose. He for his part, having heard both from Mrs. Wythe, believed the last, and he proceeded to set forth his reasons with the convincing skill of which he was master.

And all the time Beatrice sat still and listened, saying nothing ; unconsciously ignored by Delmer in his angry preoccupation, consciously by Luttrell, who felt it the best way in the circumstances. It is not often that one is called upon to play audience while a matter touching one so nearly is argued out by others. Beatrice did it, her face in the shadow, so that none knew how much or how little she was moved by what was said.

At last Luttrell rose. All that could be said had been said. Beatrice had her name again, and what satisfaction she might derive from the accidental legality that had followed from an old woman's deception.

"I don't think we need keep Mrs. Curayl any longer," he said. "Are you staying in the village ?" He slipped his hand through Delmer's arm as he asked. "We may as well walk back together."

There was something friendly, almost familiar, in the appearance of the movement, but there was something unpleasantly policemanlike in the feel of it. Delmer resented it, and would have resisted the thinly disguised compulsion had it not brought home to him the obvious fact that Luttrell was much the more powerful man of the two.

"Will you let us out by a door ?" Luttrell asked Beatrice. "The window isn't a very convenient or dignified exit."

She led the way to the hall and opened the great



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door for them, standing herself near the threshold. For a moment she stood so, irresolute, while the two men passed out. Luttrell turned on the step.

"Good-bye," he said, and his tone still had the touch of gaiety that always seemed to come to him when he was dealing with things he would not probe.

She still hesitated, then she spoke on impulse ! "Don't go," she said, "there is something I want to say to you."

Luttrell stopped. "My friend," he said to Delmer, "do you mind waiting for me—in the toolshed ? I expect we can find one handy. I will see you home afterwards."

But Beatrice considered this precaution unnecessary. "No one can enter this house," she said, "if the library shutters are fastened, unless I open the door, and I shall not do that again."

"In that case," and Luttrell released Delmer's arm, "don't let me detain you," and he went back into the house, leaving the other to express his feelings outside the closed door.

Beatrice returned to the library ; Luttrell followed her. When they had fastened all the windows she sat down again by the open secretaire. "Was that true which you said to-night ?" she asked.

It was a natural question under the circumstances, especially seeing how he had once deceived her ; indeed, it was the question he expected. Yet when she put it something revealed to him that it was not the subject for which he had been called back.

"Yes," he answered gravely, "it was the truth as far as I know it. I believe it myself."

The gravity of his tone reminded her that she might well seem to be doubting his word, a thing she had not meant to do. She flushed a little and dropped



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a bundle of letters. He handed them back to her, and with hardly a glance at them she threw them into the fire, all tied together as they were. "They are no use," she remarked, and fell to arranging and rearranging her papers, not nervously but with a curious want of system.

"I did not mean to doubt your word," she said after a pause; "that is the last thing I meant to do. It is not for that I called you back to-night, but to tell you that I understand—to apologize——"

He stared in frank amazement. "To apologize?" he repeated. "What for?"

"For my injustice, my—my ingratitude. I know all about it now," she went on, a little thread of passion breaking through the calm of her voice. "I have heard your tale in full. I have learnt several things—that my first estimate, formed when I left you with your confession half made and not at all explained, was wrong. I have learnt, too,—I have something a little wiser and truer than the old narrow standard by which I judged the world——"

She might have said more but he cut her short; he wanted neither apology nor justice at her hand, something quite different.

"You were right," he said curtly, "your judgment was just. I had started by acting a lie, and a lie's a lie all the world over, and—you hate lies."

"Yes," she admitted, "I hate lies. I used to think I was true myself, and I will tell you what I did—I, who hate lies. You remember the bargain of which we spoke that last night, the contract of which the other party had fulfilled his share and I was to fulfil mine?—I repudiated it. I would not fulfil my part, and for no better reason than because you advised it."

Luttrell nodded; he acknowledged a heavier share



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of responsibility in that than she intended. "A man cannot act a lie and yet expect to be believed when he preaches the truth," he said somewhat bitterly."

But she was not thinking of that. "That has nothing to do with it," she said. "I did what I did because I was angry, for no other reason ; it was my own affair solely. I have made what little restitution I can since, it is true, but it is not much. I will tell you about it—no one else knows ; I could not explain to others, but you will understand."

And she told him how she had refused her husband's money because of her breach of the contract which they had once agreed she was in honour bound to fulfil.

He heard her out. This, then, it seemed, was also indirectly his fault, this poverty and loss which had come upon her.

"I wonder," he said, but rather as if he were considering an impersonal matter, "if any one ever made as much mischief as I did by that preaching at Curayl."

"You did not make mischief for me," she answered. She began unfolding her papers again. She had left them for a few minutes ; now she returned to them, looking at them but not mastering their contents. "Do you remember something else you said ?" she asked, "about such a union as mine being like the union without the ring ? It was true. You cannot know how true, for you do not know the terms of my marriage, the hateful degradation of it. But when the end came, and they told me I was his widow and rich, I found freedom in flinging back the money. I did it in the first place because I knew it was honest ; but I found a satisfaction in it too. Perhaps you will think it foolish, but I said to myself,

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'The woman without the ring, the woman who is kept for pleasure and has to make profit while she can, could not do this. She would not be called upon to do it; it would be her right to make what she could.' But it was my right to make restitution."

Luttrell turned to the fire and stirred the charred ashes with his foot. He could not trust himself to speak.

But Beatrice had not done; she had stripped off her pride and reserve, and she had done it thoroughly. There was another question in her mind; it had lain there, a chilly burden, more than a year.

"It was what you thought that you told me that night?" she asked. "It was"—her heart was beating suffocatingly—"it was what you really thought of me—of such a union as mine?"

For half a second he paused. He would have given his right hand to be able to deny it, but he could not truly, and it was no time for lies; he bent his head, then fell to stirring the charred ashes again.

Beatrice looked away; her heart had slowed down once more; she saw plainly now the papers and the foolish mistakes she had made in her sorting of them.

"You are quite right," she said in a low level voice. "I think so too now—it is because of that I wanted to ask you to forgive my condemnation of you. Considering what I am it is hardly for me to condemn any."

But flesh and blood could stand no more. He turned upon her almost fiercely. "Good God!" he said, "is there only one virtue, one hope, one chance of forgiveness?"

She caught her breath: something half fear, half hope sprang to life at his tone; but she put it from



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her. Had he not, two minutes ago, acknowledged her as one of the fallen and dishonoured?

"Will you hear what I have got to say?" he asked, and for some reason she could not answer, though the girlish colour flushed her cheeks.

He came and sat down on the corner of the table near her. "Let's begin at the beginning," he said, "though, for the life of me, I don't know what the beginning is—unless it is 'I love you.' But then the middle is 'I love you' and the end—Well, that's just 'I love you' too—unless by some divine and undeserved miracle we can vary it and say 'You love me.'"

CHAPTER XXII

AND after all Luttrell did not give Beatrice the packet that night at Curayl. He remembered it when he let himself into the Rangers' house at an hour unprecedented in the annals of the worthy family. But it really did not matter very much, he reflected, he could take it to her the next day.

But as it happened he did not go very early, not till the afternoon in fact. He had to go to the Waterside in the morning, as he had promised Mrs. Wythe. Tollinger had been to the old woman in obedience to a message from Luttrell, but he had not seen her. When he got to the Waterside he found all the houses dark and silent, Mrs. Wythe's as much as the rest. He had tried her door and found it fastened, knocked and received no answer, looked up at the windows and seen no light. He came to the conclusion that she must have pretended her illness to Luttrell, and either gone away soon after he left or else be in hiding in the house and purposely refusing admission. In considerable annoyance he went back, and in the morning told Luttrell what had happened.

"She is there fast enough," Luttrell replied. "She must have crawled downstairs somehow after I left and fastened the door. I would not have believed it possible ; still, when a woman of that sort

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is bent on a thing she is equal to remarkable effort. She was determined to be alone, and she has achieved her end. I ought to have warned you she would try. I expect we shall find her dead this morning."

Dead she was when they found her, lying on the bed to which she had somehow managed to crawl again after some hours of effort. She must have died, so Tollinger said, in the early morning, going out with the last of the night, alone, as she had wished. And whatever evil secrets she knew she carried with her, no one who came after learned them. Luttrell, in accordance with a wish she expressed that last evening, burned her sea chests and all they contained unexamined, so no one was the wiser or the worse for what they held. And of the tale she told with almost her last words there was no proof, but Luttrell believed and always would believe that it was the truth that she spoke at the last.

It was with a thoughtful face that he set forth to see Beatrice that afternoon. His mind was still occupied with the old woman lately dead, and the part she must have played in lives long since ended. But the picture of that time which he called up vanished when he reached Curayl, for Beatrice came out to meet him. She stood in the doorway with the mellow sunlight on her face and the long shadows about her feet, and the still, ineffable peace of late September all around her. In that perfect hour even the great grey house looked sombrely benign ; but they did not go into it. Almost unconsciously she led him away from the dark hall to the sunlit garden which spread before. Down weedy paths, they went, and over thick green grass that was never dry now, under the yellowing trees where

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the robins piped, to the ruined terraces and the crumbling wall where the little late roses bloomed as they had bloomed last year and the year before, and nobody knew how many years before that. And all the way they spoke of things that had been spoken of before, not only last year and the year before, but every year since the world began and man loved woman and woman man.

But at last when they came to the mouldering wall they began to speak of other matters. Luttrell, though he had forgotten the packet again, remembered that there were several things unexplained.

"You have taken me very much on trust," he said. "There is a good deal I suppose I ought to tell you."

"About yourself?" Beatrice asked. "Mrs. Crief told me something about you. I saw her often during the winter."

He asked her what she had been told, but she could not recall anything she wanted to repeat, though she remembered almost every word she had heard, so she only said, "I don't know—that she knew your father, long ago, I think."

"That was not enlightening. Didn't she tell you anything else?"

"That—that your name was Anthony."

Luttrell raised surprised eyebrows. "Indeed!" he said, "I had no idea you possessed so much information. You have kept it to yourself very successfully."

She laughed and found herself blushing ridiculously; then she said rather sadly—"It is no use playing at youth, we are a man and woman of the world, not a girl and boy tasting the firstfruits of life."

It was true, he knew it; his hair was turning grey,

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and she was a woman in years and still more in experience. "We have lost a lot of time," he admitted, "we must make up for it now."

She shook her head. "We can't," she said. "Nothing can give back the lost years nor undo what they have done. It is as easy to call back a May dawn as to make me a girl again."

"I don't want you a girl," he declared. "I want you as you are. For myself I have no quarrel with the years, they have treated me very well; and not much quarrel for you, though they have treated you badly, seeing that they have left you what you are."

Possibly he told her what she was to him; afterwards she reminded him of the other subject: "You were going to say something about yourself?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, "I was going to fill up the gaps in Mrs. Crief's information."

"It was all gaps."

"In that case I will begin at the beginning. My name is Anthony Luttrell—you know that by the way. My age, I regret to say, is thirty-seven. My income I'm afraid I can't state exactly; it has undergone changes lately; still, I suppose I am what people call a rich man."

"Are you?" Beatrice's voice showed that the information surprised and did not altogether please her. "I think I'm sorry."

"So am I if it displeases you, though speaking personally I don't regret it. I'm afraid there is no help for it anyway. I have even got richer lately—through no fault of my own; a misguided relation died this spring while I was away and left me all his property. There is a little coal pit and a big iron works and a lot of other things. The iron works is on strike at present, and the coal pit, I

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am told, is going to follow suit later on. I thought of going north soon to try and grasp the situation. You know I enjoy that kind of thing. A muddle with a big crowd in it and an opportunity of interfering, that is just the sort of thing that suits me, especially if there is the chance of a little stump oratory thrown in."

Beatrice seemed amused, and asked for further information ; but she did not get it, for just at that minute he remembered Caser's packet.

"I had almost forgotten it again," he said, taking it from his waistcoat pocket. "Let's get rid of it at once. I have had it quite long enough. It is yours, I believe," and he offered it to her.

"Mine?" she said in surprise, hesitating to take it.

"Yes," he answered, "I think so—I will tell you about it."

And he told. She listened, a good deal astonished, but piecing the tale in with what Delmer had said yesterday.

"Caser gave it you!" she said, feeling the shape of the thing through the wash-leather. "It must be—it is the miniature!"

"I do not know what it is," Luttrell answered. "I was to give it to you as it is. It is for you to see what is inside."

She ripped open the little bag, and there sure enough was the missing ornament. The jewelled setting was quite unhurt, the diamonds glittered in the sunlight, the rubies in the gold band gleamed like drops of blood, but the portrait they framed was utterly ruined.

"I expect it is very much damaged," Luttrell said, leaving her to examine it uninterrupted. "Tollinger's what you might call a thorough man. He

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disinfects properly; he didn't give the bacilli a chance or the contents either."

Beatrice held the ornament in her hand, looking intently at the face that showed discoloured and almost distorted in the brilliant setting.

"My mother's portrait was at the back," she said, turning it over. "I put a piece of tissue paper over it to keep it from being scratched. It has stuck fast; I cannot get it off."

"You might be able to have it cleaned," Luttrell suggested.

"Perhaps so," she said, and put the gleaming thing on the wall as if it interested her no more. She sat down beside it, and for a little was silent; then she said—"You do not know the whole history of it, do you? I will tell you. I only knew it yesterday—my brother told me. It is ugly, as all that concerns us is, but you had better hear it."

Luttrell had not the slightest wish to. He could see that it would hurt her to tell, and serve no purpose to hear. But she would tell it; she seemed to have a curious desire to discover to him all the flaws in her family, which she had before been at such pains to hide from any. So she told the whole sordid tale as Delmer had told it to her. Luttrell listened, his back against the wall, his eyes fixed on the garden. When she had finished there was a long pause; he did not seem to have any comment to make. At length she said—"Now you know why, though I appreciate the trouble you and this man took to bring my miniature to me, I cannot care for it as I did."

"Yes," he answered, "I understand. It has too much history."

Again there was a pause; then she moved a little and with her dress accidentally knocked the orna-

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ment from its resting-place. He picked it up and handed it back to her.

"What are you going to do with it?" he said.

"I don't know. I should like my mother's portrait taken out. Will you do it for me?"

He opened a short bladed penknife and began to prise out the ivory oval. She did not watch him; both knew why. Had it not been said that the sketch of the mistress probably underlay the painting of the wife? But whether it really did or not Beatrice never knew; she did not look or ask, and Luttrell volunteered no information, but when he had wrenched her mother's portrait free he gave it to her without comment.

"What is to become of this?" he asked, taking up the broken frame.

"Nothing," she answered, "throw it away."

He did not obey, and she felt that some other thought was in his mind. "You don't think it ought to be thrown away?" she asked. "What would you do with it if you were in my place?"

"I think," he said slowly, "I should give it to Delmer."

Beatrice flushed a little; then she said, "He insulted me. Do you know how much?"

"No," he answered, "but I should like to see him again and hear about it. We would have a long talk, a lovely talk," and he drew a switch he had broken off between his fingers caressingly, almost as if it had been a whip. "It would be an improving talk," he said, smiling pleasantly. "Afterwards I believe I would give him the other miniature and its setting."

"Why?"

He hesitated, then said gently, "I think for the sake of the woman who had it first."

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"The woman without a ring?" Beatrice said "For that reason I suppose I ought to feel for her. After all we were kin, she and I. I am akin to every woman who sells herself so and suffers so. You think for the sake of the mother you would give it to the son? Still he has no claim to it. It was my own, my mother's and then mine; he has no right to it."

"No," Luttrell agreed, "not in strict justice, but we don't all get only strict justice—I haven't myself."

"You maintained that we did get it," she said quickly. It seemed almost that she caught at the opportunity to follow a side issue. "In that sermon you preached at Curayl you spoke of the unerring justice time deals. Do you remember? You said we all met it, so that we truly reap what we have sown."

"I know," he admitted, "I said it, and I still think it. To a great extent it is true. Time does deal justice, and Fate—a sort of personification of cause and effect, deals it too, a consummate justice beyond appeal. Still for all that we find ourselves asking more than justice of those we love. We hope, even if we are too proud to say it, that they will give us a little measure of kindness over, credit us sometimes for what we only intended and judge with a generous blindness."

Beatrice looked up. "I gave you justice without mercy," she said.

"And now you give me mercy beyond all justice."

She shook her head. "No," she said, but she smiled, and in a little held out her hand for the miniature. "I do not want to deal such justice again just yet," she said. "Let us take out my father's portrait, it is quite spoilt and valueless. I



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think we will bury it. The jewels we will do with as you think best."

So he took out the second portrait as he had taken out the first. She watched him this time, but she was not thinking of what he did, rather of himself. There were several things about him which puzzled her still, most of all something in connection with the last night at the Waterside. She had not seen him since then until last night, and on the one occasion he had told her to go back to her husband and on the other he had said he loved her. What had happened between, she wondered, as she watched him loosening the setting of the miniature. Had he, like herself, found out the secret alone? Could a man's love grow without sight or contact, forcing itself upwards painfully against all obstacles in the dark?"

She raised her eyes with a question. "That evening at the Waterside you told me to go back to my husband," she began, and stopped half ashamed.

"That is so," he admitted.

"Then you didn't—you didn't—"

"Love you?" he finished for her. "Oh, yes, I did. If you want the truth I was once not very far from the villainy of telling you so."

"You loved me," she said; "you loved me, and yet you told me to go back!"

The men of her house did not do such things. What they loved that they must achieve then and there, cost what it might to another. Love wore a different look among the Curayls, and honour had another meaning.

But Luttrell did not think about that; he went on unframing the miniature and explaining himself rather apologetically the while. "It seemed to

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me," he said, " the best thing, in fact the only thing, for you to do then—to go back. I don't suppose I should have said anything if you had not spoken, but you see I was almost driven to advise, and I could not honestly advise anything different. I wanted something different, it is no good denying it; but I hadn't the villainy, or the courage, to suggest it. I had nothing to offer you—you of all women—but infamy. I was near it once. When you refused to go and hesitated over the reason, and spoke of your new-born abhorrence for the union, I own I was very near it. I was a beast; I hate myself for it. I thought—well, never mind what; it was you by your complete innocence of what was in my mind that saved me."

" I ? " she said, and somehow her stately control gave way so that her voice rang. " It was not I, it was you yourself, the best and noblest that is in you ! Why do you belittle yourself ? Do you think I shall believe you and be deceived, now that at last I have found a Man. Ah, if you knew the sort of men I have known ; if you knew the stock I come of, the thing we have degraded by calling love ! "

" I should think precisely as I do now," Luttrell said ; " and that is, that the Almighty has made of one flesh all men who dwell under heaven, and given most of them a little smirch with the tar brush to make them sort of cousin german to one another, in at least a taste for the works of darkness. I don't differ materially from the men you speak of ; my weaknesses may lie in another direction, but they are there. You ought to know that, since you have forgiven them."

She was not convinced. " You do not know," she said. " Their weaknesses and yours are not to be spoken of in the same breath."



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"You think not? I can't agree; that is, if the breath is long enough. A short one would barely serve to enumerate both."

He had the portrait free now, and putting the jewelled setting for Delmer in his pocket he turned to her with his curious smile.

"Have you exalted me," he said, "because by the mercy of God and the innocence of your own mind I was saved from acting like a cad? Don't do it, lady mine, don't do it, for that or anything else; you'll be sorry if you do. If ever there was a man with a genius for falling off high places in other people's esteem I am that man."

He sprang down from the wall where he had sat to break up the miniature. "Now let us make a grave," he said. "Where shall it be? Here at the rose roots, or further on? I think further; perhaps they may disturb the ground here some time."

He moved some paces and began to scrape away the soft black earth with a stick. She watched him till he had made a deep little hole, then she put the portrait in and he covered it over. And if a pencil sketch of a woman's face was buried there too no one ever knew, for both were hidden out of sight at the foot of the old wall.

When all was done they moved away, and walked in silence till they came to the steps that led up past broken urns to the higher walk. They went up together, and at the top Luttrell paused to look at the beautiful overgrown place.

"I would like you to see it," Beatrice said, following his eyes. "I would like you to see it all with me to-day."

She led him down winding paths and across green, leaf-strewn lawns, showing him tangled borders and great cedar trees and terraces where broken



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vases stood. She led him across the moat, wide and deep with still green reaches where nothing moved. Showed him arbours where a damp twilight lingered and the air smelt of mould, always of mould. Took him to more open places where the gnats danced all the brief warm day, the only thing that stirred. She showed him all there was to see, the whole place of stately decay that lay adream that afternoon of late September. And all the time one thought filled his mind and took possession of it—the thought, the certainty even, that she was saying a silent good-bye to it all.

At last when the sun had almost gone they found themselves once more by the house front.

"I am glad you were with me," she said, looking back. "I am very glad. It is the last time I shall walk here, you know."

He did know only too well. "It need not be," he said; "there at least is the advantage of money. I can get the place back for you—you shall still be the Lady of Curayl."

But she shook her head. "You can't do it," she said, "it is all settled now."

"I can unsettle it," he returned and probably he could even then. Beatrice might still have retained it had she so willed.

But she did not. "It is all dead," she said, "a great grey shell from which the soul has fled. Come into the library and I will show you something."

He followed her. "We will put the soul back again; you and I together will build up a new life here."

"And the work in the north?" she reminded him. "The coal mine and the iron works, the people who are your tenants, and the workmen who



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call you master? You can't really live here and there too."

She opened the now empty secretaire and took out a letter which had come by that morning's post. "Read it," she said.

He did so. It was from the man who was coming to Curayl; a polite letter, principally to say that he would like to have some more definite name for the house. The present arrangement, by which there appeared to be no separate name for it, seemed to him curious and rather unsatisfactory. If Lady Goyte-Curayl had no objection he would like to call it "Summer Court."

Luttrell read the letter through. It struck him as very incongruous just then, the name even grimly humorous in its unsuitability; but the suggestion determined him, in spite of Beatrice's words, to prevent even the possibility of such a thing.

But she had quite another thought in her mind. She watched him read in silence. When he had finished she took the letter again. "So you see there is an end of Curayl," she said.

"No!" he answered. "There is not and there need not be—unless you wish it."

She knew otherwise. "There already is," she said. "It is all ended. I know it better than you, better than any one. I persuaded myself for a long time that there was something still alive. I tied myself to it. I was going to galvanize it into life, this dead body of family tradition and family pride, a tradition that was bad and a pride that was false. I knew it was all that, yet I sacrificed to it—to find at last that there was no longer a soul, only a superstition, a poor dead fetish. But the end has come, even the poor fetish is gone—I am free. Let him call the place 'Summer Court,' let him begin a new



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life here. The life that was here is dead and gone. I shall be glad if something new can rise on the old ashes. It will be something different, I know; quite new, untrammelled by the past; otherwise I think it could not live. I do not want to come back here; I do not want to see the place again. I have nothing here: the life is gone, my very name is shaken, but I want no name, no life here, none anywhere"—and she smiled with a shy sweetness that was new to her—"except what you give me of yours."

He held out his hands and she put hers in them. "There is no Curayl," she said, "and no Curayls. It is all ended."

"And you?"

"I was a Curayl," she answered low. "But I shall be—I shall be—your wife."

"Are you content," he said, "content with so little?"

"With so much," she answered. "I am content."

THE END



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